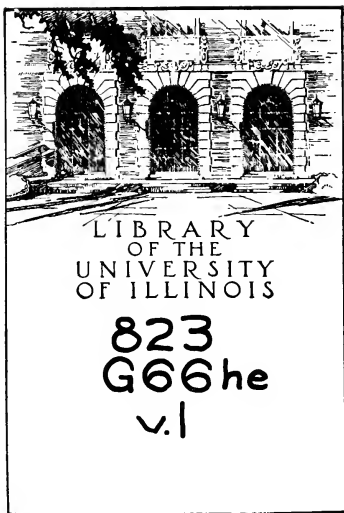


G. H. Lyne



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THE
HEIR OF SELWOOD:

OR,

THREE EPOCHS OF A LIFE.

BY THE AUTHORESS OF
"MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS," "MRS. ARMYTAGE,"
AND "STOKESHILL PLACE."

"LEON. How now, boy?

MAM. I am *like* you, they say.

LEON. Why, that's some comfort!"

WINTER'S TALE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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“I have been so idle since I came into Worcestershire,” pleaded Sophy, looking wistfully at her preparations for a diligent day’s work.

“Do not disgrace our delightful rides, drives, and saunters, by the name of idleness,” exclaimed Lady Norman. “Fie upon your ingratitude, Sophy !—When you came to Selwood you scarcely knew a nettle from an ivy-bush, or a gnat from a dragon-fly : and consider what country wonders I have taught you during the last three months ;—what lovely landscapes I have shewn you—what striking spots !—Instead of slaving here over your drawing-box, you should rejoice in the opportunity of another day’s study among the Selwood woods.”

“I have enjoyed so many days’ study,” replied Miss Ravenscroft, “and have still nothing to shew for my lost leisure.”

“You have not yet seen the effect of Tuesday’s frost upon the beech trees. The plantations near the river are tinged with gold. My dear Mrs. Ravenscroft,” continued Lady Norman, interrupting herself as Sophy’s mother, a good-humoured middle-aged woman, entered

the room, "pray help me to persuade your daughter to her own advantage. This is the last day of my holidays; Sir Richard positively returns to-morrow, and I want to introduce Sophia to the picturesque old ford at Avonwell, while the weather admits of the excursion."

"My daughter will be delighted to go with you," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft. "I am so little able to bear her company in her rambles, that but for your kind assistance, she would have seen nothing of the neighbourhood."

"If you permit me, dear Mamma, I shall enjoy the walk beyond everything," cried the light-hearted girl, laying aside her occupation; "but you said last night I had neglected my drawing and music since we came to Selwood."

"I said so because Sir Richard Norman's return will deprive you of your friend's society, and throw you back on your usual avocations——"

"To which you wished to reconcile her beforehand!" cried Lady Norman, playfully concluding the sentence. "At least, let us

enjoy this last day's expedition; for I admit that Sir Richard is apt to exact a considerable share of my time and company."

Taking her knitting from her work-basket, while Sophia proceeded to prepare for her walk, Mrs. Ravenscroft could not but reflect in silence, that a husband so covetous of the society of his charming wife, need not have loitered three long months on the Continent on a mere excursion of pleasure.

"It is now the first week in October; and it was exactly Midsummer when Sir Richard left home," observed Lady Norman, as if penetrating the musings of her companion. "I remember that we received the letter from General Trevor announcing your having taken Selwood, and introducing you to our acquaintance, the very day he determined on his journey."

"True,—it was exactly at Midsummer."

"Your arrival at that moment seemed an especial blessing. How tedious would the summer have been to me, but for you and Sophy! General Trevor little guessed the favour he was conferring in that introduction.

'Till you came to the cottage," continued Lady Norman, with earnestness, "I never knew the happiness of a female friend. Marrying so young, and living constantly at the Manor House, with bad roads, a thin neighbourhood, and at a distance from my own family, I have never had even an intimate acquaintance. This is the chief cause of Sir Richard's regret at our having no family. People with young children growing up around them, never feel the want of an interest in life."

Mrs. Ravenscroft shrewdly conjectured that the want of an heir to his fine estate and ancient baronetcy might have a still greater share in the discontents of Sir Richard.

"But *now* all my cares are over," resumed Lady Norman, cheerfully; "you have taken a long lease of the cottage, and we have fourteen happy, sociable, neighbourly years in prospect. How I long to receive Norman's congratulations on the fortunate change your arrival has effected! Thanks to Sophy's instructions, he will find me so improved in singing, and such a proficient in German!"

“My daughter is lucky to find such encouragement in her favourite pursuits.”

“I cannot help wondering,” continued Lady Norman, after a few moments’ cogitation, “how you will like Sir Richard. Our position is so *very* strange—so *very* peculiar. That two dear friends of mine should neither know my husband, nor be known to him!—From the moment of his departure, dear Mrs. Ravenscroft, we have been passing many hours of every day in each other’s society. I have never ceased talking to you of *him*, or writing to him of *you*; yet you are about to meet as strangers. I shall only *guess* your opinion of *him*—*his* of you and Sophy, I know him well enough to anticipate. What a pleasant winter we shall pass together.”

“Admit, at least,” said Mrs. Ravenscroft, raising her eyes a moment from her knitting to the sweet face of her companion, “that you have done your best to make us familiar with Sir Richard Norman’s good qualities!”

“You will soon acknowledge that I have not praised him too highly,” replied Matilda, blushing; “yet I have more than common cause to

be partial. I owe my husband gratitude, as well as love, for his choice of one so inferior to himself in birth, station, talents, and education."

"I cannot admit a man's mere preference to be a subject of thankfulness," observed Mrs. Ravenscroft—a stickler, at all times, for the dignity of the sex. "The feeling is spontaneous, and pursued for his selfish gratification. It is only by the uniform kindness of after-life he establishes a claim on the gratitude of a wife."

"Then I have still a right to plead gratitude towards Sir Richard Norman," replied Matilda. "But here comes Sophia. I do not apologize for taking her away. I see you have ample amusements in store for our absence. Your marker has not advanced beyond the middle of Kirkpatrick's 'Nepaul.'" And the thickness of Miss Ravenscroft's shoes and shawl having been carefully passed in review by her mother, away they went on their expedition to Avonwell.

Mrs. Ravenscroft had cause to be careful. Sophy was the only child of one of the happiest

of happy marriages ; commenced in cheerful poverty, prospered by courage and intelligence, and terminated by the glorious death of Captain Ravenscroft in the service of his country, bequeathing a sailor's fame and more than a sailor's ordinary gains, to his widow and child.

Mrs. Ravenscroft, however, possessed the happiest retrospections to solace her misfortune. Amid the cares and anxieties of their early life, not an angry feeling or harsh word had disturbed their union. She had chosen to rough it with her husband through all sorts of climates and vicissitudes ; and, though neither literary nor learned, had considerable knowledge of the world and insight into human character. It was a consolation to her to find in her daughter a lively and intelligent companion, indifferent to the pomps of life ; and having wound up the settlement of their little fortune, Mrs. Ravenscroft retired to an agreeable habitation in Worcestershire selected by her relation, Lady Farleigh, and considered herself fortunate that accident had secured them neighbours so desirable as Sir Richard and Lady Norman.

Beyond the Manor House, Selwood had little to boast in the way of neighbourhood. Farleigh Castle was eight miles distant ; and the vicar and his wife were valetudinarians of advanced age. But scarcely had they been settled a month at the cottage, when both mother and daughter admitted that every deficiency was compensated by the cordiality with which they were welcomed into the country by the amiable Lady Norman.

The accidental absence of Sir Richard served to further the progress of their intimacy. Sympathy of sex, tastes, and pursuits, brought them readily together ; and long before the period appointed for his return from France, it seemed almost forgotten among them that they had ever lived apart. For Mrs. Ravenscroft, Lady Norman felt the respect of a daughter ; for Sophia, the tenderness of a sister. The simple history of their lives had often received the tribute of her tears ; and her own, less eventful and less touching, was frankly disclosed in return. Matilda related it without apology or comment. But Mrs. Ravenscroft's experience of the world sug-

gested from her simple text a thousand conjectures concerning the present prospects of her young friend, and the character and peculiarities of Sir Richard Norman.

CHAPTER II.

There, or within the compass of her fields,
At any moment may the dame be found ;
True as the stockdove to her shallow nest ;
And to the grove that holds it.

WORDSWORTH.

THERE was something baronial and commanding in the aspect of Selwood Manor House. Situated on the summit of a lofty hill and surrounded by sloping woods, it afforded a landmark for all the country round. The mansion was of Elizabethan date and architecture ; but closely adjoining, stood the remains of an ancient keep and embankment, retaining the dignified title of Norman Castle, and connected with the high origin of the family.

It might almost be surmised that, previous to the establishment of roads and inland navigation, our ancestors possessed some preternatural facility for the transportation of stone for architectural purposes. We are told in sacred story by what means the rafters of cedar were removed from Mount Carmel for the construction of Solomon's Temple; and it was pretty apparent that the venerable gray granite forming the walls of the Manor House was supplied by the ruins of the ancient fabric. But by what process the stones of Norman Castle had been originally conveyed to the site, was still a mystery. In spite of the means and appliances of modern mechanism, the miracle has never been renewed; and the frightful red-brick houses of that part of Worcestershire, are put still deeper to the blush by the sober hue of the noble façade of Sir Richard Norman's family mansion.

Secured by this solidity of construction from the injuries inflicted on other manorial houses by the vagaries of modern improvement, the Manor House had suffered nothing from the High and Low Dutch innovations introduced

under the auspices of the houses of Hanover and Nassau. The windows retained their noble proportions, the doors their original entablatures, and the furniture was characteristic and appropriate. Old pictures, old arras, old carvings, old porcelain,—all was quaint and antiquated. With the exception of a suite of rooms fitted up for Lady Norman on her marriage, everything remained as in the days of the first George; when the alliance of Sir Rupert Norman with a city heiress, produced the partial renovation of the old manor.

The house was of liberal, but not stupendous dimensions; fortunately enough,—since, even without any vast intricacy of corridors or staircases, it was gloomy and dispiriting. The disproportion of the old-fashioned panes of glass to the windows,—the fretted cornices and groined ceilings,—the dingy hue of the satin hangings and mahogany doors,—produced an unpleasant effect upon eyes accustomed to contemplate the airy but meretricious elegance of modern taste; nor was it possible to pass a winter week under Sir Richard's roof without admiring the hardness

of his predecessors, ere the arts of lighting and heating attained their present pitch of perfection.

Considerable respect was impressed at the same time upon the guests at Selwood Manor towards a family which furnished such noble portraits to the picture-gallery, and such majestic monuments to the parish church. For a century and a half, indeed, these last had suffered interruption, — the latest Norman interred at Selwood being a cavalier of the reign of Charles II.; since which epoch, the members of the house had suffered grievous dispersion. Some were lying at St. Germain's, some in Austria, some in Italy. Many had seen the light on foreign ground, and were to foreign dust returned. Even the present inheritor, Sir Richard, was receiving his education at the college of Scotch Benedictines in Paris, when the outbreak of the first French revolution sent him back to complete his studies in his native country.

In all this, and in everything relating to the Manor, there was a certain character of the

stately and aristocratic, which lingers with peculiar odour of sanctity among the Roman-catholic gentry of England. The idea of a *mésalliance* on the part of the head of such a house, seemed almost preposterous. Yet such was the fact. Lady Norman was the daughter of a Warwickshire manufacturer; and, what was held more heinous by the hereditary servants of Sir Richard, a heretic,—the grand-daughter of a protestant minister of the gospel! They were almost resigned to the affliction that the marriage-bed of the degenerate Baronet had proved childless, lest the daughter of perdition should bequeath a touch of heresy to the future representatives of his line!

From any *religious* scruples on the subject, however, Sir Richard Norman was free. From the period when, at fifteen years old, he was driven home from Paris, till now, when the recent restoration of peace to Europe enabled him to visit it again, the stanchness of his adherence to the church of his fathers had been gradually weakened. But catholicism was at that period an injured and suffering cause; and

a sentiment of chivalry attached many of its least credulous sons to the drooping banner. The dissipations of London society, however, had done their part to diminish the respect of the gay young baronet for the abstruse doctrines so long and tediously inculcated by his jesuitical preceptor, the Abbé O'Donnel; and Sir Richard sometimes found it difficult to fire himself up to becoming warmth of championship, when the cause of catholicism, as a political question, was discussed in his hearing at the fashionable dinner-tables, with the arguments of the fashionable periodicals of that day of intolerance.

Apprehensive of alienating the affections of his opulent disciple from a cause so much in need of the support of wealth and consequence, the Abbé had been an indulgent task-master. His lessons went no further than the surface. He required from young Norman only the semblance of virtue,—the renunciation of faults and frailties revolting to the moral order of society. Egotism, the master vice of the heart, the besetting sin of the great and prosperous,

he suffered to flourish unchecked; and Sir Richard grew up accordingly the slave of impulse—the creature of selfishness and pride.

Handsome and intelligent, there was little opening for the display of his talents; and the career of public life being closed against the young papist, it was in libertinism and excess that his misdirected energies were suffered to run to waste. That was a dissolute era of the dissolute London world!—The excitement produced by the extraordinary political events agitating the Continent seemed productive of universal disorder. Every day brought tidings from afar of struggle and death; and, as if ashamed of their inaction, the idlers of London plunged at each rumour into deeper intemperance. Among the wild and reckless, Sir Richard shone pre-eminent. It was only by a certain *hauteur* of manner and beauty of person, that he was distinguished from the throng of the fashionable ruffians of the day.

Once emancipated from the control of guardians and tutors, there were none to interpose their counsels between him and ruin. An or-

phan in childhood, he was the sole survivor of his family. Of the once flourishing house of Norman, there remained only a second cousin, on whom the baronetcy and estates were entailed; who, whether as his former guardian or future heir, was an object of unqualified dislike to Sir Richard.

In that quarter, however, the ancient family seemed secure from extinction. Mr. Norman was the father of a numerous offspring, all rigid catholics, and like himself engaged in mercantile pursuits. Giles, the eldest son, was a partner in his father's bank; Rupert, the second, the head of a house of business in Trieste; a third was settled in New York; and two younger ones, destined to the same thriving career, were studying at Stonyhurst. Old Norman, who had amassed a considerable fortune in commercial life, was fond of sneering at those unprofitable members of his church who, excluded by the injustice of the country from professional distinctions, were too proud to conquer an independence by humbler means. The banker was a hard, unpolished man, ill-calculated to con-

ciliate the regard or submission of his young relative. With the faults or follies of his ward he had never condescended to argue. His only form of control was irony,—of all coercions the most hardening to the mind of youth. In Sir Richard's boyhood, he had been sneered at for aping the vices of a man; in his manhood, for aping the follies of a fine gentleman. Mr. Norman openly predicted that his ward would never come to good,—a prediction, how often the cause of its own accomplishment!

Vainly did Mrs. Norman, a being of somewhat gentler mood, represent that it might be injurious to their children to provoke the resentment of the head of the family.

“What signifies the lad's enmity to *me*?”—was her husband's blunt reply. “His liking or disliking will neither cut off the entail of the estates, nor divert the line of succession. Should he die unmarried or childless, I *must* succeed him; and should he leave children of his own, his warmest affection would not suffice to alienate a guinea from his rent-roll in favour of his relations.”

Influenced by this matter-of-fact view of their connexion, Mr. Norman persisted in refusing every concession required by the young baronet. During the minority, he took care that the Selwood estates should be properly administered ; and, on resigning his trust, troubled his head about them no more. He had more to gain by attending to the ventures of his own argosies and the fluctuation of public securities, than by speculating on the inheritance of Sir Richard Norman ; and, once or twice, when (the embarrassments of the young man requiring the co-operation of the heir-at-law) the men of business of the baronet applied to the men of business of the man of business to negotiate between them, Mr. Norman's replies were not only negative, but insulting.

Such was the state of affairs between the cousins, till Sir Richard attained his seven and twentieth year ; when Mr. Norman was one day suddenly reminded by his wife, that their kinsman was still in difficulties, and still a bachelor. The remark, probably, bore indirect reference to the introduction that season

into society of their only daughter, Agatha ; for upon Mr. Norman's indulging in his usual exclamations against Sir Richard, his lady answered, with great *naïveté* — “ Extravagant and dissipated I admit him to be, but *that* might render a fortune of fifteen thousand pounds the more acceptable. Marry he certainly will ; and if our son Giles *is* to be cut out, better by a grandchild of our own, than by the son of a stranger.”

Startled by this luminous view of the case, Mr. Norman indulged in no further interjections. The project was more sagacious than he had expected to hear unfolded by his wife. He liked the thoughts of hedging his odds of the Selwood property—of insuring his venture—of underwriting his spec. The match would be an excellent one for his daughter ; and in so business-like a point of view did the affair present itself to his mind, that he wrote that very day to Sir Richard, stating the amount of his daughter's fortune, proposing the connexion, and inviting him to form a more intimate acquaintance with the family.

But young Norman, a wassailer at Water's, and frequenter of the Argyll Rooms, was a very different being from the raw impetuous boy, whom his harsh guardian had formerly sneered into shame, or controlled by a scrape of the pen.

"Marry the beastly fellow's daughter!" was his indignant exclamation, on receiving these cool proposals from the man he most disliked on earth—"I would as soon bestow my hand upon a barmaid!"

The terms of his letter of rejection were not many degrees more courteous; and Mr. Norman's commentary on the text, that "he deserved the rebuke, for having been willing to accept a broken-down spendthrift for his son-in-law," confirmed their mutual ill-will, and established a lasting feud in the family.

It happened that, a few days after his cousin's taunt was repeated to him, (with due exaggeration on the part of the good-natured friend who employed himself as spite-bearer between the belligerents,) Sir Richard set off from the Manor into Warwickshire, to join a fashionable

party at Arden Park, for the county races. Still labouring under the excitement of mind produced by his family quarrel, he was ready to listen to any foolish suggestion of his own, or other people's. The repeater of grievances, by whom his wounded pride had been thus inflamed, had already whispered, when inveighing against the arrogance and interestedness of the heir-at-law—"Marry, my dear fellow; marry, and disappoint the expectations of the family!"—and Sir Richard Norman was quite in the humour to adopt these sapient counsels.

In his immediate circle, indeed, were divers lovely ladyships and honourable misses, ready and willing to second his intentions; but Sir Richard was too well versed in the arcana of fashionable corruption to risk his honour at such fearful odds. The houses of parliament from which he stood excluded, had been devoting their attention that session to half a dozen lordly divorce-bills; and with all his desire to hurl defiance at his offending heir-at-law, Sir Richard demurred.

Anxious, irritated, flushed with unnatural

vivacity, he accompanied Lord Arden's party to the races, and concluded the day at a brilliant ball, given in the Town Hall; and there, while surveying the oddities and uglinesses usually abounding in such heterogeneous assemblies, his attention was arrested by a fair form and prepossessing countenance, which seemed to belong to a higher sphere of society. Captivated by these attractions, he obtained an introduction to Matilda Maule; whose modesty of deportment and elegance of manners completed the charm. The delicacy of extreme youth bloomed on her cheek, enhanced by a profusion of light glossy ringlets. In the course of an evening's acquaintance, Sir Richard fell desperately in love; and Mr. Norman's chance of inheritance was thenceforward scarce worth noting.

A country town during race time, is an ark where inferior and superior animals are jumbled together in undistinguishable confusion. The following day the waters subside, and the assemblage disperses itself anew over the face of the land. While Lord Arden's party, including

Sir Richard Norman, returned to Arden Park, Mrs. Wickset's party, including Miss Matilda Maule, returned to a stuccoed villa, within a few miles of Birmingham. For, alas! the young lovers belonged to orbits far as the poles asunder;—Sir Richard being head of a house of eight hundred years' gentility; and Matilda's father, Mr. Maule, the head of a house of business in the hardware line, extensively known as the firm of Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co.

The discovery of the young beauty's want of connection might, at any other moment, have nipped in the bud the passion of her new suitor; but to the influence of Matilda's attractions was added that of his desire to thwart the expectations of his cousin; and the first moment he could release himself from the Ardens, he hastened to avail himself of an invitation from Mrs. Wickset to visit her at Acacia Place; and for three weeks following, was scarcely a day absent from Matilda's society.

Weary of the emptiness and egotism of fashionable life,—weary of waltzing young ladies

and manœuvring mammas,—the gentleness and simplicity of Matilda's character completed the conquest her beauty had begun. To attach the idea of vulgarity to such a being would have been as absurd as to inquire the pedigree of the Venus de Medicis. She was a thing apart—a creature too richly gifted by nature to be weighed in any ordinary balance; and when at length he hazarded his proposals, the wealthy Baronet was inspired by the only sentiment which ought to influence a lover's heart at such a moment,—that it was the height of presumption on *his* part to aspire to the affections of a person so infinitely superior.

Matilda's answer was favourable. She referred him to her father; and Mrs. Wickset being shrewd enough to guess that Sir Richard Norman's attachment was likely to be put to severe tests by a visit to the factory, and a first introduction to the two resident partners, Messrs. Maule and Cruttenden, promised that Matilda should return home in time to shed a conciliating grace over the preliminary interview

between the Baronet and his future father-in-law.

Though it was one of those cases of love at first sight which seem to justify the most disproportionate alliances, she felt that it would be injudicious to fortify, by personal disgusts, the opposition which the wayward choice of Sir Richard Norman was likely to excite among his kinsfolk and acquaintance.

CHAPTER III.

What is that curt'sy worth?—or those dove's eyes
Which can make gods forsworn!—I melt, and am not
Of stronger earth than others!

SHAKSPEARE.

ALTHOUGH Norman's wild adventures had beguiled him so far beyond the narrow pale of fashionable society, that he was apt to fancy the world was known to him in all its aspects, high and low, rich and poor, tatters and brocade, —a new page in the heavy volume of life was unfolded to him at the factory. To have traced his beloved Matilda to a cottage, and raised her from the picturesque rusticity of hawthorns and a thatched roof to the splendours of Selwood Manor, would have been an act of poetical jus-

tice. But, alas! the sooty establishment of Messrs. Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co. proved an anti-climax to every high-wrought aspiration of his soul.

Situated at the extremity of a dirty suburb, the huge ill-painted gates stood so near a tanner's yard that the fury excited among Mr. Maule's squadron of mastiffs by the sudden stopping of Sir Richard's curricie called forth the sympathetic rage of the tanner's yelping regiment of curs; and when the stranger pushed his way along an avenue formed by two lofty, dingy walls, and discovered at the close a gloomy-looking brick-house, facing an extensive range of buildings which in aspect resembled a penitentiary, and in smell, the London gas-works, his disgust was complete.

A squalid-looking individual, arrayed in paper cap, fustian drawers, and a dirty, ragged shirt, whom he beckoned from a pump, undertook to acquaint Mr. Maule that a gentleman wished to speak with him; and Sir Richard walked impatiently up and down beside a range of coal-sheds, sickened by the smell of engine-grease,

and stifled with the smother of the furnaces, till he was accosted by a square, sober-looking, brown-gaitered gentleman, whose loose and somewhat seedy coat seemed made to embrace the whole firm of Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co.; and who touched his broad-brimmed beaver respectfully to a stranger having so much the air of a customer well to do in the world.

After proceeding so far in explanation as was admissible in the open yard, Mr. Maule led the way into his dwelling-house; where Sir Richard was informed that, instead of approaching it through the respectable iron gates and sweep forming the regular entrance, he had crept in the back way, where there was "no admittance except on business." Still, the atmosphere was the same. Everything on the premises, from the window-blinds to the hollyhocks in the garden, was blackened with soot; nor was it till, having followed his sober guide into a neat, airy drawing-room, he found himself surrounded by a choice collection of books, drawings, and musical instruments, he could bring himself to believe that such was the terrestrial paradise of the

angelic being by whom his soul had been “lapped in Elysium” at Acacia Place.

Neither Matilda nor her letter of explanation having at present reached her father, Sir Richard Norman had his own tale to relate; a tale so passing strange, that Mr. Maule was obliged to have it thrice repeated to him before he could arrive within many degrees of comprehension. To learn that the gentleman before him was a baronet of high descent, with a rentroll of eight thousand a-year, come to ask for the hand of his daughter, and offer her a jointure of three thousand per annum in return, was a thing to have been scouted as an idle hoax, had Maule been of jocular nature, or versed in the fooleries of London life.

But the manufacturer was a grave, stern man; soured by the loss of a wife who had brought him six children to provide for, and taken herself to a better world when it behoved her to stay and take care of them in this,—and absorbed by the important interests of a factory employing eight hundred workmen, and a capital of fearful amount. Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co.

gave their names and money to the firm, Maule his whole time and attention. The grimy atmosphere was as natal air to him; and the clattering of wheels and stamping of beams, the natural music of his sphere. He had become almost a part of the machinery. The business of his workdays was to amass as liberal a provision for each of his six children as had been bequeathed by his parents to himself; and the relaxation of his Sabbath to secure, by a threefold attendance at divine worship, a blessing on the sixfold gains he made it his duty to heap together; justifying his over-carefulness for the things of this world, by attributing his narrow thrift to the instinct of parental affection.

To such a money-mill of a man, it was almost a disappointment that his future son-in-law made no inquiries into the amount of fortune it would be convenient to him to bestow upon his daughter, in addition to the five thousand pounds to which he fancied all the world must know Matilda to be entitled by virtue of her mother's settlement; and he had scarcely patience when the notification of his intended liberalities pro-

duced no change in the handsome countenance of Sir Richard. He began to suspect that all was not quite right with the mysterious stranger, —and begged time to talk the matter over with his friends. “Matty was expected home every hour. On the following morning he would have the honour of waiting upon Sir Richard at the King’s Arms.”

Although from the moment of setting foot in the factory-yard poor Norman had been chiefly anxious to bring his visit to a close, he was not altogether satisfied with this summary dismissal. He had anticipated a more cordial reception. He felt that, like a good bill, he had a right to be accepted at sight. Nettled by the coolness of Maule, and disgusted by the fumes of his domicile, he could have found it in his heart to order posthorses and return to the pure altitudes of Selwood Manor ; for he had now been some hours absent from the influence of Matilda’s charms, and was beginning to discover that in love, as in all beside, “*ogni medaglia ha il suo reverso.*”

On the morrow, however, instead of waiting

for the visit announced by Mr. Maule, he was at the factory by ten; a note from Matilda, announcing her return, having invited him to join them at breakfast. Under the presidency of the lovely girl, whose natural elegance imparted all the refinement previously wanting to the little household, the establishment assumed a different aspect in his eyes. Old Maule, too, had become cordial and courteous. He was now prepared to shake him by the hand, to give him his daughter, to add ten thousand pounds to her fortune, and to devote her original five thousand to pay off the baronet's incumbrances, in consideration of the handsome jointure secured on the estate to the future Lady Norman. Mr. Maule's present amenity of deportment was no less remarkable than his churlishness at their first interview.

This sudden change was naturally attributed by Sir Richard to Matilda's representations in his favour, and the influence of his personal merit. So ready are we to convert the commonest incidents of life into tributes to our egotism and self-esteem! Mr. Maule's

change of demeanour was, in fact, solely produced by the coarse raillery of one of his partners !

Of the firm of Maule and Co., Thomas Cruttenden alone was a bachelor ;—a man of a certain time of life,—without connection, without education, raised to opulence by his own exertions,—dry, whimsical, and disagreeable. Deficient in the ordinary topics of discourse, Tom Cruttenden delighted in adding weight to his conversation by saying the most unpleasant things, and enforcing their poignancy by a knowing wink. He liked Maule and his family better than any other human beings, was godfather to the second son, and a steady friend to them all. But in choosing to become an inmate under the roof of his widowed partner, he seemed anxious to be always on the spot to comment on the irregularities of the establishment, and the faults of the children. Over young Cruttenden Maule, his godson, he exercised something of partial parental authority ; but as to Matilda, for many years past he had been descanting daily on the absurdity of the

accomplishments bestowed upon her, and the probability that she would live to become a burthen upon the family.

“What man in his senses will marry the girl?” was his nightly ejaculation to his partner, as a seasoning to the tumbler of hot Madeira negus with which they concluded together the evenings of their busy days. “What earthly thing can Miss Matty do to make herself useful?”

“She makes me happy, and that is all I require of her,” replied the old gentleman.

“She makes you happy because you see her with the prejudiced eyes of a father. But what will a reasonable being of a husband say when he finds her tanging away at her harpstrings when she ought to be minding her family? But she’s never likely to *have* a husband, reasonable or unreasonable. Take my word for it, Matty Maule’s name is too much up in this town as a poor, helpless, make-believe fine lady, for any of our young men to think of her. Poor Matty’s marked for an old maid!”

By dint of having this denunciation dinned

in his ears, Maule had at length begun to think less favourably of Matilda's attractions. The wife of his junior partner, Mr. Wickset, a kind, motherly woman, by whose advice his daughter's education had been completed by a competent governess, consoled him with assurances that, at every fresh visit of Miss Maule to her sociable house and neighbourhood, new admirers presented themselves. Old Cruttenden was always ready to exclaim, on the return of the young beauty, "What! back again from the fair, Matty, with the white handkerchief still round your neck?—Can't Madam Wickset, with all her caperings and vapourings, manage to get you out of the market?—Never mind, my lass!—Come down a peg or two next fair day, and no doubt you'll fetch something handsome yet."

It was to this comfortable friend that Maule had repaired for sympathy after his first interview with Sir Richard Norman. "A baronet with eight thousand a year!" cried Cruttenden, with one of his dry chuckles, after receiving the exulting communication of his partner. "Come,

come!—you don't mean to swallow such a hook at *your* time of life?—Baronets with eight thousand per annum don't grow on every bush!—I warrant we shall see the fellow advertised next week in the 'Hue and Cry.' ”

“The 'Hue and Cry!' ” retorted Maule, with some indignation. “Sir Richard Norman's manners are those of a high-bred, accomplished gentleman.”

“The deuce they are!—Why, what do you pretend to know, pray, of the manners of high-bred, accomplished gentlemen?—Look in the police reports,” cried Cruttenden, with one of his most knowing winks, “and you will find that all these travelling swindlers have what *you* call the manners of high-bred, accomplished gentlemen,—that is, they sport a gilt guard chain and copper eye-glass!”

“Sir Richard wears neither the one nor the other,” replied Maule, commanding his temper.

“More fool Sir Richard!—Dare say he was Sir Lionel last week, at Leamington or Buxton; and may be, Sir Albert Fitz-something or other, at Cheltenham, last year!—Send

a description of his person to the Clerk of the Peace, and I warrant you'll hear news of Miss Matty's precious fine-gentleman sweetheart at the Town Hall!"—

"I need not go so far," replied Maule, scarcely able to subdue his irritation. "He brought me a letter from Mrs. Wickset, to whom he had the most satisfactory introductions."

"Mrs. Wickset!—ho, ho!—Why this is better than all the rest.—Now, just inform me what Jacob Wickset's good woman should know about Wurstershire baronets?—She was never thirty miles from Brummagem in her born days.—Madam Wickset would be taken in by Jowler the house dog dressed up as a dandy, provided he bowed low enough, and took care not to shew his tail.—No, no, Maule! take *my* advice,—*I* know something of the world!—*I'm* wider awake than you are!—When this humbugging chap sneaks in to-morrow morning, lock up your silver spoons, and ask him for a reference. If *that* don't bring him to his mar-

row-bones, rely upon it the hardened wretch is returned from transportation."

"There are not the slightest grounds for suspecting him to be other than he pretends; and——"

"Of course not!"—interrupted Cruttenden, with another provoking laugh. "You see, Maule, you've brought up that girl of yours with the notion of her making a match, and choose to take for a swan the first goose that hisses an offer.—But Tom Cruttenden's not to be bamboozled with borrowed plumes.—Tom Cruttenden's had his breeding in a school where fine words butter no parsnips.—Tom Cruttenden don't care a cheeseparing for the cut and colour of a coat, provided there's something heavy in the pockets; and I'll be bound that the weightiest thing in this Sir Thingumee Norman's is a bunch of skeleton keys.—At all events, pray don't let him into the compting-house; I wouldn't trust such a fellow with change for half a crown."—

These pleasantries were wormwood to old

Maule; for he possessed no means of disproof. The coarse bantering of his partner was at all times a drawback on his comfort; yet he had not courage to resent it. Habit rendered the company of the man with whom he had so many interests in common, a portion of his existence; and though Cruttenden was always abusing the children,—calling the boys dunces, and the girls dawdles,—Maule was aware that he would cut off his right arm to do them service, and that they were likely to succeed to a large portion of the old bachelor's fortune. Still, though unwilling to come to a quarrel, it was insupportable to be thus browbeaten out of all his opinions and inclinations.

Such was the state of affairs, when Matilda arrived in triumph to secure her father's sanction to her happy prospects, and to prove him in the right—Tom Cruttenden stood defeated. Tom Cruttenden was forced to admit that the Sir Richard Norman who had been requested by the lord lieutenant of the county to open the ball with his daughter, could be no impostor; and for the first time in their lives, the senior

partner enjoyed a hearty crow over his junior. He would have crowed louder, perhaps, but for the princely marriage-gift, bestowed by the eccentric Tom upon "Miss Matty," affording sterling proof of his regard for a family with whose foibles he made so free.

To detail the petty mortifications which rendered Sir Richard's courtship a period of penance, would be a task both frivolous and vexatious. Though shortened beyond his hopes by the frank dealing and despatch-of-business celerity of Mr. Maule, there was leisure for a thousand biting jests from Tom Cruttenden, a thousand trivial irritations from the whole family.

"Every man to his taste!" was Tom's exclamation, on learning the difference of religion between the young people. "I wouldn't give *my* daughter to a Papist!"

"Sir Richard is no bigot," argued the father. "He allows Matilda the full exercise of her opinions; and though their sons must be reared as Roman Catholics, the daughters will follow the same church as their mother."

"About their sons or daughters I care not a

jot," cried Cruttenden; "seeing that they never may have any. But when that poor lass finds herself surrounded with a set of canting priests and bigoted kinsfolk, and sees her husband telling his beads all day long, and worshipping graven images——"

"But I tell you that Sir Richard is by no means a rigid Catholic," interrupted Maule.

"So much the worse. Since he *is* a Papist, better be a good 'un. If a man isn't stanch in his religion, in what, pray, is he likely to be in earnest?"—

A scruple thus raised in the conscience of old Maule, his stipulations with his son-in-law concerning freedom of worship for Matilda and Matilda's daughters, became almost offensive. Sir Richard found his religious opinions as abhorrently regarded at the factory as those of a Mahomedan; and even Matilda was rendered uneasy by the officious hints and denunciations of her father's friend. He had scarcely patience with their narrow fanaticism. He had borne with their uncouthness, their want of civilization, their purse-pride, their egotism; but he

could not stand being talked at as a Jesuit on the watch to burn the whole bench of bishops at the stake, and requiring the strictest vigilance of the legislature of the country.

It was some palliation, meanwhile, of Tom Cruttenden's offence, that his sneers at the growing ostentation of the family determined old Maule to solemnize his daughter's wedding with modest privacy. In spite of Mrs. Wickset's indignation, and the outcries of the little Maules, not a creature was invited. Sir Richard's venerable preceptor, the Abbé O'Donnel, officiated with deeply-wounded feelings in the Roman-catholic service that united his pupil to a Protestant; while Cruttenden's contempt for drawing-room altars and special licences caused the Protestant ceremony to be solemnized in the parish church; after which, the happy pair emerged from the sulphureous atmosphere so ill adapted to the filmy wings of Cupid, and set off for Selwood Manor.

Even on the eve of the great event, with the settlements signed, the family diamonds accepted, and Matilda's wedding-clothes packed in the

imperials of the new travelling carriage, Sir Richard felt half inclined to break off his ill-assorted connexion. Though Matilda was dearer to him than ever, he could scarcely surmount his disgust at the coarseness of mind of those with whom she was associating. The spotless feathers of the dove contract no defilement from the rude materials of her nest, and Matilda had escaped as by a miracle the slightest tinge of vulgarity; but he could not help fearing that she shared in some slight degree the misgivings and mistrusts of her father. At some moments it was with difficulty he forbore exclaiming,—“If you consider me a monster of cruelty and deceit,—if you think that I shall not only deal harshly by you but prevent your disclosing your wrongs to your family,—it is not yet too late. I am ready to break off our engagement.”

But the angelic expression of Matilda's eyes arrested the words upon his lips. A life of peace and happiness was unfolded in the serenity of those lovely features; and he felt that it was

his duty to bear much, in gratitude for the affection of so sweet a wife.

Already he had enjoyed the triumph of announcing to the Norman family his approaching marriage with a beautiful girl of seventeen, with a fortune of twenty thousand pounds; amassed, indeed, in trade, but subject to no reproach on that score from the banker of Lothbury. They knew that young Norman was not to be Sir Giles, or Miss Agatha, Lady Norman; and had given forth from their strong closet, at his order, the precious family diamonds, heirlooms long marked as their own. This was almost compensation for the nods, and becks, and knowing smiles of Tom Cruttenden, and the austere reserve of old Maule; and added new raptures to his wedding-day.

On passing, however, for the last time through the dingy toll-bar adjoining the factory of Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co., Sir Richard secretly protested that his lovely bride should return no more to that city of soot and calcination. Her brothers were at school; her

sisters still in the nursery. She had no bosom friendships to attach her to the place,—no ties of kindred or sentiment. Henceforward, his idolized Matilda must forget her own people and her father's house,—forget the sound of the factory bell, its squalid population, its baleful exhalations,—and become exclusively, for better or worse, Lady Norman of Selwood Manor.

Could there be a stronger proof of the inappropriateness of the connexion, than that the first resolution to which it gave rise was an outrage against the first and holiest duty of our nature !

CHAPTER IV.

What! will the line stretch to the crack of doom?
Another yet?—a seventh?—I'll see no more!

SHAKSPEARE.

YEARS passed away with their alternations of joy and sorrow,—day and night; and Sir Richard still admitted himself to be, according to common parlance, the happiest of men!

It was amazing with what facility Matilda had glided under his authority into the social duties of her new vocation. At the close of a few months, no one could have suspected her of having moved in any lower sphere than that of the Manor House. Her docile nature instinctively adopted her husband's habits and pursuits; and when they occasionally joined the

convivial meetings of their thin and scattered neighbourhood, the simple unpretending elegance of Lady Norman's manners was even more applauded than her surpassing beauty. Lord and Lady Farleigh invariably cited her to their London friends, as the most distinguished ornament of their county.

Sir Richard, meanwhile, had evidently exhausted his taste for frivolous dissipation. Happy in his home, he devoted himself to the cultivation of his estate, to study, to field-sports. Cheered by the lively society of his young wife, there was no further occasion to forfeit his self-consequence by jostling in the tawdry mob of fashionable London. By mutual consent, they abjured all connexion with the metropolis.

It was but natural that Sir Richard's disappointed heir presumptive should attribute this secession from the world to consciousness of having formed a *mésalliance*. But the Normans were mistaken. Sir Richard had ceased to regard Matilda as aught but a portion of his aristocratic self; and, as his wife, she was entitled to her share of worldly honours. The

susceptibilities of his self-love were suffering from a wound of very different nature.

The Catholic cause was just then at its lowest ebb. Long reduced to insignificance in the court and councils of their Tory sovereign, the Catholics had been recently compelled to withdraw their trust from the Regent. Their prospects were narrower than at any preceding moment; and in proportion as hope declined, the ardour of their fraternization became more vehement. Sir Richard redoubled his contributions to their funds, became a member and correspondent of their societies; and fought over the question of emancipation every evening with a worthy neighbour named Mandeville (the original possessor of Selwood cottage), till Matilda became a political, if not a religious, convert.

Once in every year, on his way to town for the annual settlement of the affairs of the firm, Mr. Maule visited the Manor House, to rejoice in his daughter's happiness and gratify his pride by the sight of her prosperity. His parental hortatives to Lady Norman were brief but comprehensive,—“Not to forget her Maker, not to

forget herself;" and though he declined trusting her little sisters on a visit to the Manor, within grasp of the Abbé O'Donnel, never presumed to trifle with the religious or political prejudices of his son-in-law, after a first visit to the picture gallery and chapel of Selwood Manor. He seemed to understand that the Catholicism of the Normans was a legitimate portion of their inheritance.

All went smoothly among them till one unlucky day, when (an auspicious letter from his illustrious friend Mr. Grattan having put Sir Richard into unusual spirits) he was rash enough to suggest an invitation that Tom Cruttenden should accompany his partner, on Mr. Maule's ensuing periodical journey; and though indignant that the invitation should have been so long delayed, the old gentleman's desire of once more beholding "poor Matty's pretty face," induced him to array himself in a new snuff-coloured suit with brass buttons, and ensconce himself in a corner of his partner's postchaise. But, alas! before he had been half a day in the house, there was no longer peace in Israel; and

Matilda trembled for the sequel. The jocose old gentleman had discovered that even at Selwood there existed a *raw* on which his whips and scorns could be made to fall with agonizing force; and to spare was an effort beyond his generosity. The Normans had been eight years married, and had no family. What a triumphant opportunity for a licensed jester! Old Tom was never weary of inquiring, with a knowing wink, in what part of the house the nursery was situated;—where was Master Norman's rocking-horse, and little Miss Matty's doll; till Matilda, who had hitherto resigned herself patiently to the want of children, could scarcely restrain her tears.

Nor was he less jocose with Sir Richard, on the barbarity of moping up his pretty wife in a tumble-down old country-house, “which, to say the best of it, was as deadly lively as a house of correction.”

“I recollect when you was at the factory before your wedding,” said the spiteful old bachelor, “we thought it vastly pretty of you to present poor Matty with a parcel of diamond

necklaces and gimcracks, in which we fancied you meant her to figure away at court.—Who'd ever have thought after all this, of your making her a state-prisoner !—Why, she led a merrier life at Brummagem, taking her pleasurings with Mrs. Wickset ; to say nothing of Christmas hops at Mr. Blowpipe's up at the foundry."

"I have lost all inclination for balls and races," interrupted Lady Norman, growing uneasy ; " I am growing old.—You forget that I shall be seven and twenty next birthday."

"Indeed I don't, Matty. Nobody can look in your face and forget *that* ! All your fine bloom's gone, child. Your best days are over ; and that's what frets me at your having moped away your youth in this out-of-the-way place, with nothing to shew for it. If you'd been nursing a fine family of spanking boys all these years, I'd say something to you. I meant you, my lady, to supply me with a second godson. But I find your brother Cruttenden's to remain my sole heir ; just as your title and fortune, it seems, must go to a distant relation, be-

cause you've been too lazy to furnish us with a young Master Dicky of your own."

The five hundred pound-note placed by the old gentleman next day at parting in Lady Norman's hands, "to make threadpapers of," formed a poor compensation for the wounds inflicted by this ill-timed raillery. For two days after his father-in-law's departure, Sir Richard was thoroughly out of sorts. Never had he seemed so sensitive to the mortification of seeing his inheritance descend to "an unlineal hand—no son of his succeeding;" and, as if in express aggravation of the grievance, the *Morning Post* announced that week among its memorabilia, the birth of, "At Grove House, Herts, the Lady Catherine Norman of a SON AND HEIR."

It was scarcely a year since the same authority had put forth intelligence of the marriage of "Giles Norman, Esq., jun., to the eldest daughter of the Right Hon. the Earl of Roscrea;"—and already the junior branch was germinating!

Henceforward, Lady Catherine Norman and her son and heir were to be thorns in the side

of Selwood Manor. Before Master Norman could run alone, a portrait of the young gentleman and his cockade appeared in the exhibition ; and having been transferred to the engraved gallery of the buds and blossoms of our aristocratic Eden, was disseminated throughout Great Britain. Sir Richard affected to laugh to scorn the vanity of the parents ; but his laughter was lip-deep,—there was pain and grief in his heart.

It was noticed by Matilda that the Baronetage and Red Book of 1812 (in which was inscribed, in addition to the particulars of his own birth and marriage, and the usual “HEIR PRESUMPTIVE, Giles Norman, Esq., of Grove Park, Herts ;” the birth among the collateral branches of the family of Giles, the son of Giles Norman, Esq., by Lady Catherine, daughter to the Earl of Roscrea,) was suffered to lie with uncut leaves on the library table. Nay, the plans previously sent in by his architect, for two fine new lodges to his park, were rolled up, knotted with red tape, and permanently laid on the shelf. To the great disappointment of Mr. Stucco,

the Baronet's zeal for the improvement of his estate had suddenly subsided.

Unluckily for Matilda, in the midst of all these irritations, Mr. Mandeville, the neighbour at Selwood Cottage who had hitherto shared with her the ebullitions of her husband's ill-humour, was compelled to quit Worcestershire and reside upon his Irish estates ; and in the course of that solitary, taciturn, peevish winter, she began, for the first time, to suspect that the sun of her happiness might be overclouded. She began to dread Sir Richard's return home from his morning's sport ; to fear that the family at Farleigh Castle might notice how often his cutting remarks brought tears into her eyes ; and just before the next annual visit of her father, became so alarmed lest her husband's moroseness should attract his attention and draw down the animadversion of Tom Cruttenden, as to invent some trifling pretext for evading the visit of Mr. Maule, pretending to have formed engagements from having mistaken the date of his arrival.

But Matilda was an unpractised and a bad

dissembler. Tom Cruttenden, seeing through her shallow excuses, insisted that her father should proceed to the Manor House as usual, and ascertain the motive of her deceit; and there, according to their anticipations, Lady Norman and her husband were detected,—without guests or engagements! Old Maule scarcely waited to be alone with his daughter, to reproach her bitterly with her disingenuousness.

“When you were a young child, Matilda,” said the old gentleman, “you would have died rather than utter an untruth. Is it because you are a baronet’s lady, that you think yourself privileged to bear false-witness to your poor despised tradesman of a father?—Equivocation, Lady Norman, is a lower and meaner thing than the lowest of callings!—A falsehood returns sooner or later to the bosom of him who utters it, like a viper flung into his face!—But, as my friend Cruttenden was saying to me the night before I left home, ‘All this was to be expected. Matty’s been taken out of her own condition and creed, and what good was like to come of it?’

Isn't she under the control of an old Jesuit of a priest?—Isn't she already half a Papist?" "—

Matilda was unable to repress an impatient movement of dissent.

"I don't say that you attend chapel, or tell your beads, or believe in transubstantiation," cried the old man, repeating the words of the oracular Tom Cruttenden; "but you have learned to say one thing and think another; and if that's not the true meaning of being a Jesuit, I don't know what is."

Again Matilda remonstrated, but her father was not to be propitiated. He came in mistrust, and quitted her in anger; protesting that her sister Betsy, who had now almost attained to womanhood, should never incur the risk of contamination by becoming her sister's inmate at the Manor.

And thus, in proportion as Matilda stood in need of the countenance and affection of her family, was she fated to estrange their regard. She had only to resign herself to a dreary perspective of seclusion and isolation; enjoying her

happiest moments when she could persuade her husband to enliven his monotonous life by a trip to town, which secured her for a time from his irritability.

So stood matters at the Manor House when, ten years after the celebration of Sir Richard's childless union, the sudden downfall of Napoleon gave rise to the unexpected pacification of Europe. Eager to revisit the religious community from which he had been so long estranged, the Abbé O'Donnell immediately determined on an excursion to Paris; when Matilda suggested to her husband that it might interest him to review the scenes of his boyhood, and take a glance at the long-closed city of revolutionized, republicanized, and reroyalized France.

Weary of home and the monotony of his aimless existence, Sir Richard Norman needed little persuasion to comply with the suggestion. At that moment arrived General Trevor's letter, announcing the Ravenscrofts as likely to become most desirable neighbours; and finding his wife thus opportunely provided with companionship

for the summer, he had no longer any scruple in taking his departure, or prolonging his absence.

He went, — the Ravenscrofts came, — and Matilda grew contented and happy. A new existence dawned upon her in the society of such kind and conciliating friends. Sir Richard's return was again and again deferred; and she was careful to find no fault with the postponement. Attributing to the false position in which he was placed by his disproportioned marriage, the fractiousness into which he had latterly degenerated, she felt convinced that change of scene and society would restore him to his happier self.

The prolongation of his absence, however, gradually softened, and at length obliterated all recollection of his harshness. At the close of three months' absence, she remembered him as the impassioned lover of her youth,—the affectionate husband of her early domestic life; not as the angry man resenting upon herself the irritating jokes of Tom Cruttenden. To the Ravenscrofts, therefore, she described him in glowing

colours. His portrait announced him to them as one of the handsomest men in England ; and Matilda protested that the merits of his character more than rivalled those of his portrait.

Their interest thus excited in his favour, the strangers grew almost anxious at the frequent postponement of his return ; more especially as, whenever his long absence was alluded to at Farleigh Castle, a significant glance was apt to pass between Lady Emily and her brother, Lord Selsdon ; the meaning of which was a mystery to the new comers. Again and again did the Baronet announce his immediate arrival, and again and again disappoint them. Sophy Ravenscroft often started up from her drawing and ran to the window, in the notion that his travelling-carriage was passing the cottage palings, on its way to the lodge-gate of the park ; and when, on the day succeeding her ramble with Lady Norman to the ruins of the forge at Avonwell, no Sir Richard made his appearance, they became alternately alarmed and indignant. Sophy felt sure some accident had occurred ; Mrs. Ravenscroft, apprehending mis-

chief still more serious, shook her head and said nothing; and on learning the following evening that Lady Norman was still alone, walked up kindly with her daughter after dinner, to drink tea uninvited at the Manor.

On their arrival, Matilda was in tears. Like themselves, she had begun to apprehend that something was amiss; and finding her so thoroughly discouraged, the Ravenscrofts made it their duty to cheer her spirits by reassurances. An equinoctial gale was blowing so boisterously as to render it probable that Sir Richard was delayed at Calais, and necessary that Lady Norman should order her carriage to be in readiness at eleven, to convey back her friends across the park; and the inclemency of the weather without had its usual effect within, of inducing them to close sociably round the fire. Immediately after tea, Sophia was persuaded to take her seat at the piano; Mrs. Ravenscroft drew forth her ever ready knitting; while Matilda placed herself for a moment on a low ottoman before the fire, to caress a favourite pointer which was basking in the warmth of the hearth.

It happened that between the waltzes and marches with which she was amusing them, Miss Ravenscroft paused to relate a lively anecdote connected with one of the pieces ; and her companions were vying with each other in applause and laughter at the mimicry with which the gay girl enlivened her narrative, when, lo ! unobserved by any of the party, the door flew open ; and there, folded in his travelling cloak, stood Sir Richard Norman, an unnoticed spectator of their mirth !

CHAPTER IV.

Churlishness is a spurious kind of freedom.

TACITUS.

It is a trying thing, even to a good-tempered man, to arrive at home from a cold, hurried, hungry journey, and find everything proceeding there as if the master were forgotten,—nothing in readiness for him,—nothing distressed or disorganized by his absence.

But Sir Richard Norman was *not* a good-tempered man. Rendered arbitrary by early independence, selfish by subsequent indulgence, and fretful by the reminiscences of a wasteful, dissolute youth, he had now his family disappointments to aggravate former defects. He

had scarcely patience to conceal his indignation at finding his wife indulging in the silly levity of a school girl, when his protracted absence ought to have filled her with grief and consternation. Her recent letters to Paris had described her as all anxiety for his return ; yet he was evidently not cared for,—not expected,—not welcomed,—as became the allegiance of a loving wife.

As these reflections passed rapidly through his mind, he was half inclined to re-enter the carriage, and return to the place from whence he came. But the spare form and grave countenance of the Abbé O'Donnell met his view as he turned to quit the room ; and immediately recovering his self-possession, he advanced majestically into the circle, and claimed the greetings of the astonished party. Too well-bred to exhibit his dissatisfaction in presence of strangers, he received with courtesy his introduction to Mrs. Ravenscroft and her daughter ; but already he had conceived against them a sort of jealous antipathy. They were more familiar than himself with Lady Norman,—more at home than himself at Selwood Manor.

The Ravenscrofts, meanwhile, were thoroughly embarrassed by knowing themselves to be in the way. Some time must elapse before the carriage could be ready to take them home; and the constraint of manner arising from feeling themselves *de trop*, was considered by Sir Richard as intended to mark the *gêne* inflicted upon the happy little party by his presence.

Delayed by adverse winds, the travellers had been in some peril, much perplexity; and in the fear of inflicting further uneasiness on Lady Norman, had come direct from London without even pausing for refreshment on the road. Supper was to be prepared in haste; when, as one footman was busy carrying up Sir Richard's baggage, and another conveying a message to the stables to hasten the carriage, the butler took care to be as long and awkward as possible in the removal of the tea-things, to mark his sense of injury at the labours thrust upon his unaccustomed shoulders.

Matilda, meanwhile, startled out of all self-possession by the unexpected arrival of her husband, found the words of welcome faltering,

between laughing and crying, on her lips. One moment she was about to give way to her spontaneous delight in welcoming home her beloved husband; the next, she was chilled back into reserve by the clouds she beheld gathering upon his louring brow.

Meanwhile, but for a conversation got up between Mrs. Ravenscroft and the Abbé, the least embarrassed of the party, a dead silence must have ensued; and it was a relief to Matilda when the carriage carried off her friends. Sir Richard had already retired to his room to change his damp dress, leaving her leisure for the recovery of her spirits. But, alas! further mischiefs were in progress! All expectation of his arrival having ceased at so late an hour, no preparations had been made for the travellers. The only fire burning was in the small bedroom in which, during his absence, Lady Norman had taken refuge from the vastness of their state apartment; and accepting this accidental circumstance as an intimation that he was to inhabit it alone, he turned indignantly away,

and ordered the camp-bed in his dressing-room to be prepared for his use.

Deeply mortified by the coolness of his reception, which he attributed to suspicions and resentments such as had never entered the candid mind of Matilda, he snatched up the gauntlet he supposed to have been thrown down to him, and prepared to act on the defensive. After supping tête-à-tête with the Abbé in the chilly dining-room, where the fire had been so imperfectly rekindled, that he rejected Lady Norman's proposal of bearing them company, he retired to his chamber for the night; and Matilda, after waiting some time for his return to the saloon, took refuge silently in her own. Before morning, the husband and wife had taken their resolution.

“ I understand the terms on which she has vouchsafed my pardon !” mused Sir Richard. “ She knows all,—probably through the tale-bearing of these Ravenscrofts ; and, too politic to resent, is too much of a woman to pardon nobly. Be it so !—I will not stoop to en-

“treat a more generous extension of her forgiveness.”

“Absence has completed the alienation commenced by indifference!” was, on the other hand, Matilda’s mournful meditation. “It is something that he has deigned to return home, and is disposed to live with me as a friend. I will not aggravate his dislike by vexatious explanations.”

There was no longer confidence between them; and rarely does *perfect* unreserve subsist between a Protestant and a Catholic. However nearly united by the bonds of personal affection, a shadow of reserve on one part and mistrust on the other, darkens their attachment. A sort of mysterious intercourse seemed established between Sir Richard and his priest, which Lady Norman vainly attempted to fathom, and which she fancied implied an *arrière pensée* in matters connected with herself. Aware how vehemently the Abbé had argued with his pupil against his purposed marriage, she concluded that he was still her enemy; and in their moments of more confiding affection, had once

playfully remarked to her husband that, were not divorce (the sacrament of adultery, as it is powerfully defined by the Roman Catholics) contrary to the canons of his church, she was convinced the Abbé O'Donnel would sooner or later persuade him to put away his Protestant wife."

This feeling of mistrust was now powerfully renewed. Sir Richard, after passing some months abroad in the company of the Abbé, had returned more cold, more care-worn, than ever. Involuntarily she recalled to mind Tom Cruttenden's remark at his last visit to the Manor—"Mark my words, Matty, that you will repent keeping that Jesuit of a priest about your house, like a pet rat or tame snake. I tell you, child, he would drown you in the Severn to-morrow, if heretics could be made away with without chance of a judge, jury, and condemning cap. I tell you to beware of Father O'Donnel."

To resist or resent the Abbé's influence, however, either now or at any other time was she knew impossible; and Matilda, with pa-

tient humility, resigned herself to coming evil as to evils past. She subdued her feelings sufficiently to appear at breakfast the following morning, with smiles upon her countenance that sat upon her conscience like hypocrisy; and tried to talk away her embarrassment by a thousand unmeaning inquiries to the travellers, concerning the diversions and habits of the continent.

“ You will shortly see and judge for yourself,” said Sir Richard abruptly, in reply. “ Unless you have some reasonable objection to urge, I intend to pass the winter on the continent.”

Matilda’s first emotion at this startling announcement was grief at the idea of a separation from her friends; but she mastered it sufficiently to reply, in pursuance of her system of conciliation,—“ Pass the winter abroad?—It will give me the greatest pleasure!—Where do you think of settling?—When do you intend to set off?”—

“ In about a fortnight,—as soon as I have completed my arrangements here for a long absence. I wish to fix myself at Paris; but I

would not engage a residence there till I had consulted your wishes on the subject."

Had Matilda at that moment glanced towards the Abbé, whom she was secretly accusing as the author of the plan, she might have discerned, from the amazed and displeased expression of his countenance, that this was his first intimation of the intentions of Sir Richard. But her attention was riveted by the unexpected courtesy of her husband's last remark.

"How kind of you," said she, "to make my wishes a consideration!—I am delighted at the thoughts of visiting Paris; and, at the time you have fixed, shall be quite at your disposal for the journey."

The Abbé was almost provoked by this ready acquiescence,—Sir Richard almost disposed to think her submissive tone must be ironical. After finishing their breakfast in silence, the rest of the day was devoted by the Baronet to visiting his estate, and inquiring into the state of affairs during his absence; while the Abbé set off into Lancashire on a journey connected with his professional duties. Gladly would Matilda

have accompanied her husband on his round of the farms to contribute her mite to the intelligence afforded by the bailiff. But she hesitated to make the proposal till his horse was brought to the door ; and having received no formal invitation to ride with him, fancied her presence might be importunate, and announced her intention of setting off to visit the Ravenscrofts.

“ She might at least have spared me this one day,” thought Sir Richard, who, having expected her to propose riding, concluded that she disdained even to affect an interest in his pursuits. “ She has been meeting these detestable people hourly for the last three months, yet cannot withdraw her attention from them a single morning in favour of her husband !”

All the contrition which had been softening his heart on his way back to his long-neglected home, hardened into adamant as he came to the conclusion that Matilda had no heart ; that she neither resented injuries, nor was sensible to the concessions of repentant affection.

Meanwhile, the startling intelligence con-

veyed by Matilda to Selwood Cottage, was of a nature to dispel the awkwardness anticipated by the Ravenscrofts, in having to satisfy her curiosity respecting the impression produced on them by her husband. Her sudden departure was an affliction too overpowering to leave them leisure for embarrassment.

“Our arrival in Worcestershire, my dearest Lady Norman, seems to have driven you out of the country!” cried Mrs. Ravenscroft, sympathizing with the tears which were already falling profusely from the eyes of her daughter. “To think that you should have remained quietly stationary at Selwood for the last eleven years, and take your departure the very first winter of our arrival!”—

“It is indeed provoking,” replied Matilda. “I admit that, had Selwood borrowed no attraction from your settling so near us, I should have been enchanted at the prospect of my tour. But as it is—My dear Mrs. Ravenscroft,” cried she, suddenly interrupting herself—“supposing you were to follow our example, and meet us this winter at Paris?—Sir Richard assures me

that nothing can exceed its brilliancy at the present moment; full of foreign troops, foreign princes, foreign tourists; full of movement, life, amusement, and excitement!"

"*Too* full, I fancy, for the prudent mother of a giddy daughter," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft, with a smile. "Two helpless women, like ourselves, are best and safest in the quiet seclusion of Selwood Cottage.—I should not feel justified in so capriciously abandoning the home which it has cost me both money and pains to adjust to my liking."

"If my indiscretion be the chief obstacle, dear Mamma," cried Sophy,—who would willingly have spent the winter in Nova Zembla, for the sake of passing it with her friend,—“I solemnly promise not to urge you into expense or dissipation—not to fall in love with a foreigner, or _____”

"My dear, it is wholly out of the question," interrupted Mrs. Ravenscroft, in a tone to silence all further discussion; for she had already seen enough of Sir Richard to feel per-

suaded that such an addition to his family circle would be altogether unacceptable.

“At all events,” persisted Matilda, satisfied by this positive assertion that she had no chance of beguiling her friends into an excursion to the Continent, “let me see you every day till my departure, or you will have no opportunity of forming an acquaintance with Sir Richard. You must come and dine with us to-day.”

“I fear it will not be in our power.”

“Oh ! pray do not refuse me, now that I have only ten days or a fortnight to remain in Worcestershire.—*Pray* come and dine with us.”

“My dear young friend,” replied Mrs. Ravenscroft, who, seeing in Matilda in spite of her eight-and-twenty years a young and inexperienced creature, could not refrain from treating her like a daughter of her own,—“your company belongs this day exclusively to your husband. After so long a separation, you have no right to withdraw your attention just now from Sir Richard Norman.”

Matilda blushed deeply at this admonition.

She had too much delicacy to reveal the estrangement arising from her past and present conjugal differences. The subject was too sacred to be made a matter of feminine confidence. She dared not admit how much she dreaded a tête-à-tête with Sir Richard, or how deeply she had been wounded by his ungraciousness. Matilda was of opinion that the anguish of spirit experienced by an injured wife is to be entrusted only to Him from whom no secrets are hid.

All that remained, therefore, was submission. She returned home more dispirited than ever, and sat down to dinner, almost trembling, with one whose deportment, instead of being improved by his sojourn in the city of the Graces, afforded a strange example of the courtesy and high-breeding she had been vaunting for the last three months to her friends at Selwood Cottage !

“ Did you go much into society at Paris ? ” she inquired, some minutes after they had taken their seats at table, lest their taciturnity should provoke the comments of the servants.

“I was seldom alone,” was Sir Richard’s evasive reply.

“But, did you attend any of the splendid entertainments given by the Duke of Wellington, or the foreign princes?”

“I believe I enumerated to you in my letters nearly all my engagements.”

“It must have been highly interesting to you to visit your old college?—Did you find any person surviving who was there in your time?”

“Twenty years added to the lives of men of twenty or thirty is no such awful lapse of time,” replied Sir Richard. “You seem to consider me a very venerable personage?”

“I ought not to do *that*,” replied Matilda, “since I am not much more than ten years your junior.”

“I have not forgotten that you are ten years younger than myself,” said Sir Richard, sneeringly. “There was no occasion to recal the circumstance to my recollection.”

Matilda coloured with shame and confusion at so unjust an inference. To disguise the an-

noyance of her feelings, she recommenced her enquiries concerning Paris.

“Did you find the public buildings much handsomer than those of London?”

“That is a point so universally conceded,” replied her husband, still more ungraciously, “that it is scarce worth bringing anew into discussion.”

“The French *ladies*, then,” demanded Matilda, taking refuge, with deepening blushes, in the first topic that presented itself; “are they so *very* superior to my own countrywomen as I have heard them represented?”

Sir Richard examined her a moment in silence with a severe and scrutinizing eye. “*Decidedly* superior,” was his stern reply, conceiving himself to be subjected to a process of premeditated cross-examination. “Not in mere features, or complexion;—but they exercise their charm of manner and character too potently to leave leisure for critical examination. Refined in soul as in deportment, they are as companionable in private life as brilliant in public. A

dull or ill-bred Frenchwoman is as great a rarity as a well-bred or conversational Englishwoman,—as you will shortly see and judge for yourself.”

Matilda was silenced. There was nothing in her husband's words that conveyed absolute reproach to herself; but his looks and manner gave personal significance to them, as an attack upon her own uncompanionableness—her own want of refinement. She saw that she had given offence. It would be better to avoid all further allusion to Paris. But in flying from Scylla, she stumbled of course upon Charybdis.

“I sat some time with the Ravenscrofts this morning,” said she. “I tried to persuade them to join us at dinner, but they would not hear of it.”

“I am sorry to have been the means of frightening your friends out of the house,” replied her husband. “They seem to have been passing the greater part of the last three months under my roof; and the day of my return

hasten for the first time to decline your invitation."

"Mrs. Ravenscroft fancied you might have more to say to me, after being so long away, than you would like to communicate before strangers," said Matilda, in a faltering voice.

"Indeed?" rejoined Sir Richard, with another scrutinizing glance. "The old lady seems to be an adept in the mysteries of human nature. I must be on my guard."

"My friend Sophy is inconsolable at the thoughts of our leaving Worcestershire. Our absence this winter will make a sad difference at Selwood," observed Lady Norman, after another awkward pause.

"It was judicious to select Selwood, if they were looking for a sociable neighbourhood," cried Norman, with a sneer. "If they wanted balls and card-parties, why not settle at Cheltenham or Bath?"

"I tried to persuade them to an excursion to Paris."

"To Paris?—But they have no idea, I sup-

pose, of any such wildgoose expedition," rejoined Sir Richard, in a tone plainly indicating an intention to remain at the Manor House, should her answer be affirmative.

"None whatever. Mrs. Ravenscroft does not think it prudent to leave home so soon after settling here. Besides, she will not be *quite* solitary. There are the Lynches; there is Farleigh Castle, ——"

"With eight miles of bad road intervening, Farleigh Castle is likely to be a vast acquisition to Selwood Cottage!"

"The Ravenscrofts do not regard the distance. I could almost fancy it less than formerly. I have dined four or five times this summer with the Farleighs."

"They must have thought it singular that *you*, who invariably make excuses when I am here, should seize the opportunity of my absence to be so vastly intimate!"

"Lady Farleigh probably concluded that, finding my home less attractive, I was glad to seek amusement elsewhere."

"A flattering interpretation for *her*, certainly," cried Sir Richard, overlooking the interpretation so flattering to himself.

"Besides," continued Matilda, assuming some spirit when she found herself systematically browbeaten, "I was only prevented by my natural shyness from visiting at Farleigh Castle; and my terrors of Lady Farleigh's hauteur and Lady Emily's reserve vanished the moment I found myself familiarized in the house by accompanying the Ravenscrofts. Mrs. Ravenscroft, you know, is nearly related to Lady Farleigh."

"I should not have imagined that Lady Norman of Selwood Manor needed the patronage of a Mrs. Ravenscroft to render her company acceptable," said Sir Richard, haughtily. "My father and grandfather were the intimate friends of those of Lord Farleigh, and your indolence has alone prevented my keeping up an intimacy with the family. You used to complain so bitterly of the coldness of Lady Farleigh and Lady Emily."

“Till lately, I misunderstood their characters. The cordial, unreserved manners of my own humble sphere had not prepared me for the undemonstrative calmness of theirs. I fancied them indifferent and repulsive when they were shewing me the quiet kindness habitual to them. Mrs. Ravenscroft taught me to see all this.”

“You consider Mrs. Ravenscroft, then, better skilled than your husband in the habits of good society?—You never condescended to *ask* instruction of *me*!”

“I might not wish to remind you of my unfitness to appear in the world as the representative of your honours.”

Sir Richard’s silence seemed to reject every occasion afforded him by his wife to interpose some conciliating word.

“You were aware when you married me,” she continued, stung to courage by his unkindness, “that I had never lived in what *you* call the world. The sphere into which you introduced me was full of mysteries and perplexities to my simple comprehension. All you wished

me to understand, I thought you would explain unasked."

"I am sorry, then, to have left so heavy a task of instruction to Mrs. Ravenscroft," said Norman, with a contemptuous smile.

"There are some lessons which a woman learns more readily from a woman," said Matilda; "particularly those which she considers beneath the dignity of a man."

And the vexation of having to defend herself thus vehemently, suffused the usually delicate cheeks of Lady Norman with so radiant a tinge, that her eyes borrowed fresh lustre from her bloom; and as she shook back the clustering ringlets from her face, Sir Richard was struck by the extreme loveliness of her countenance. Renovated by a cheerful summer of exercise and independence, Matilda looked younger and more captivating than ever to eyes recently habituated to the olive-hued charms of the French ladies, and the mahogany complexions of the peasantry.

When she quitted him to order coffee in the

drawing-room, Sir Richard sat musing uneasily over the probability that she had been much admired at Farleigh Castle, and the certainty that she would command the worship of the brilliant coteries of Paris.

CHAPTER V.

The time was, once, when thou un-urg'd wouldst vow
That never words were music to thine ear,
That never object pleasing to thine eye,
That never touch well-welcome to thy hand,
That never meat sweet-savour'd to thy taste,
Unless I spake, look'd, touch'd, or carv'd to thee.
How comes it, then, my husband, oh ! how comes it,
That thou art thus estranged from thyself?

SHAKSPEARE.

CONSCIOUS, perhaps, of the ungracious part he had borne in their dinner colloquy, Sir Richard, on repairing to the book-room, where they were accustomed to pass their winter evenings, affected a vehement anxiety to examine two numbers of the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews, which had appeared during his absence, containing valuable articles upon Eman-

cipation, from the leading dialecticians of the day.

He could not, however, pass over without an ironical compliment to the literary taste of Lady Norman the fact that their pages were still uncut. Then, having taken the folder in his hand, he ensconced himself in his reading-chair beside his reading-lamp, with his foot on his reading-stool, and justified her indifference by dozing through the first half-dozen pages of the first article, and falling sound asleep over the remainder !

The moment Matilda became convinced by his attitude that he was really lost in slumber, she laid down the work with which she had been striving to beguile her uneasy thoughts, and gazed unembarrassed upon her husband. It was the first time she had steadily contemplated Sir Richard since his return ; and she was struck by the havoc which three short months had effected in his appearance. There were lines of age about the eyes, a certain hollowness of brow, and gray hairs scattered among the raven tresses shading his temples, which she

had never noticed there before. Though advancing towards forty, Sir Richard had hitherto preserved a singularly youthful appearance. There was now a cast of care and anxiety in his face. It was impossible to look upon him without perceiving that the time of his absence must have been an unquiet one. Persons more experienced in the world might have detected the withering touch of remorse in those premature indications. But Matilda had a soul above suspicion ; she knew that other men had their vices and foibles ; that gambling, libertinism, or intemperance, might impair their fortunes, their reputations, their peace of mind ; but nothing of this kind, she fancied, could affix a stigma upon the noble name of Sir Richard Norman !

Few women, however sagacious, however versed in the ways of the world, bring their knowledge or experience to bear upon the incidents of their married life. Elsewhere shrewd and farsighted, *there* they are invariably dupes ! For the happiness of the world, it is ordained that the heart, rather than the mind, shall in-

stigate our judgment of those with whom we live in intimate communion.

Still, there was sufficient to distress the gentle heart of Lady Norman, in the supposition that her husband had been unhappy. The moment such an idea entered her mind, she would willingly have entreated his pardon for even the slight show of resentment she had hazarded in reply to his animadversions. She longed to creep to his side as formerly, to watch for his awaking; then entreat to know the subject of his griefs, that she might divide the weight of the burthen. But some womanly instinct warned her to forbear! The peculiar position in which they stood forbad, on *her* part, all advances. She must wait patiently till it pleased him to vouchsafe his confidence.

Her patience, however, was fated to be put to the test. Day followed day, but not a step towards the restoration of a better understanding! Her time was passed between solacing the affliction caused at Selwood Cottage by her approaching departure, and concealing from the observation of her friends the surliness of the

man she had been so long vaunting to them as a mirror of intelligence and amiability, who had returned home only to break up the comfort of the little party.

It was impossible, however, for the Ravenscrofts to deceive themselves as to the unavowed uneasiness of their charming friend.

“So we are to lose our neighbours at the Manor House this winter?” said Lady Emily Farleigh, when visiting the cottage with her brother, after riding over to offer their adieux to the Normans. “You will miss them sadly; but *we* shall profit by their absence; you will be obliged to have recourse twice as often for society to the Castle.”

“I should deeply regret their departure,” replied Mrs. Ravenscroft, “but that Lady Norman will benefit by the change. Poor thing!—she has seen too little of the world to be immured for life at the Manor.”—

“And with that sullen disagreeable man,” added Sophy, breaking off the conversation in which she had been engaged with Lord Selsdon.

“I am convinced she leads a wretched life with him!”

“Never pronounce hastily upon the domestic secrets of married people,” remonstrated her sager mother. “Matilda could not be so strongly attached to a man who was permanently unkind to her.”

“Norman is a fine, gentlemanly fellow,” added Lord Selsdon; “a little reserved and stately, but full of honourable feeling.”

“Never pronounce hastily upon the private life of a man you know only at battues and justice-meetings!” cried Lady Emily, parodying with a smile the lesson of Mrs. Ravenscroft. “Till you arrived here,” she added, turning towards her friends, “and drew out the real disposition of Lady Norman, we had totally mistaken her. Everything at the Manor was so dull, so insipid, that we set her down as either a stupid or a selfish woman. All the faults of the house were imputed to the *parvenue* wife!—But now we have discovered how pleasant she can be in her husband’s absence—how

sociable—how ingratiating,—we are beginning to see where the fault lies, and to fear she must lead a miserable life !”

“ Miserable, indeed !” reiterated Sophy, with the deepest sympathy. “ A husband absorbed in his own pride and self-consequence !”

“ Pride is often used as a more civil word than ill-temper,” said Lord Selsdon, laughing. “ My father is a proud man in the vulgar sense of the word ; but there is not a better tempered in the kingdom. Not a member of his family or household ever heard an angry word from his lips. Sir Richard Norman is *not* proud, or he would not have married a manufacturer’s daughter ; but I think him likely to be a cross husband, and overbearing master.”

“ Did Lady Norman tell you how long they think of remaining on the Continent ? ” inquired Mrs. Ravenscroft, apprehensive that her daughter, thus encouraged, might give vent to her feelings of dislike towards Sir Richard.

“ We had very little conversation with her. At first, Sir Richard was present, who is always a restraint ; and before we had been

ten minutes in the house, her father arrived on an unexpected visit, when we left them in haste, not to be an interruption to the interview. We felt that she must wish to be alone with her father."

Little did Lady Norman's young friends suspect that her interviews with her father were becoming almost as unsatisfactory as those with her husband. Shrinking from the interrogations suggested by old Cruttenden to Mr. Maule, Matilda's natural timidity (magnified into a foible by the despotism of Sir Richard) rendered *all* social intercourse a tax upon her sincerity. The old gentleman's unexpected journey proved to have been, as usual, suggested by the injurious intermeddling of his partner.

"Ay, ay, I knew how it would be,—I thought it would end so,"—was Tom's exclamation, on learning from Mr. Maule the intended departure of the Normans for the Continent.

"No one *can* have foreseen anything of the sort," replied the old gentleman, fractionally. "No one would have scouted the idea more than yourself, had I predicted to you last winter that

peace would be restored to Europe within twelve months,—Nap caged up in the island of Elba,—and the English free to come and go in foreign parts.”—

“I wasn’t thinking of Nap,—I wasn’t thinking of the island of Elbow,—my thoughts were nearer home,”—replied Cruttenden. “I was recollecting that, when you first told me of this precious son-in-law of yours being a Papist, I saw, as plainly as I see it now, that poor Matty was fated to be perverted out of her religious principles.”

“Matty perverted out of her religious principles?”—cried Maule, lowering his spectacles, and peering over them in amazement. “What can have put such a dreadful suspicion into your head?”

“If the thing an’t done already, ’twon’t be long a-doing. When the poor lass gets smuggled over to France, and finds herself surrounded by nothing but Capuchins and Jesuits, a-telling their beads all day long,—smothered with incense,—and bothered out of her right mind,—what chance is there of her resisting?—

I've heard tell of the most awful means being used to convert poor, weak women, who thought proper to adhere to their own church."

"Centuries ago, perhaps," interrupted Elizabeth Maule, who was presiding at the tea-table of the partners. "But the days of persecution are past; or if they still exist, surely the Catholics have as much cause to complain of the Protestants as the Protestants of the Catholics."

"Ay, ay, in *this* country, thank God, the church has still the best of it!" cried Crutten-den, with one of his knowing winks. "*We* take care to keep the beggarly priests where they ought to be.—No sneaking Jesuits ruling the state, and devouring the substance of old England.—Church and king and Protestant succession, say I."—

"And nobody gainsays you, Mr. Crutten-den," resumed Elizabeth, a girl of sense and spirit, who sometimes raised the standard of revolt against the domestic tyrant of the house. "But that is no reason why you should have always prevented my father from allowing me to accept Matilda's invitations, or why you

should try to excite his alarm just now, because she is desirous of seeing something of the world."

"With respect to keeping you quietly at home when you want to be gadding, Miss Betsy," replied old Tom, in wrathful indignation, "I admit that I have taken more pains to keep you out of mischief than you are likely to thank me for. But as to standing by unmoved when I see poor Matty about to be carried off to pass the rest of her days with that villanous nation of cut-throats, the French, I can't reconcile it to my conscience.—There's no saying what may happen to her when once she gets immured among the Papist wretches the other side of the water.—"

"'Tis a sad business, from beginning to end," sighed old Maule, who was now seriously alarmed.

"Surely, Papa," cried Elizabeth, "you do not consider my sister in danger, under the protection of her own husband, in a country of which the police is said to be the most vigilant in Europe?—"

“How do you know, Miss Betsy, that her husband mayn’t be the worst enemy she has?” demanded Cruttenden, in a mysterious voice.

“Because my sister speaks of him in her letters with respect and affection; and because Mrs. Wickset assures me that Sir Richard bears the highest character in his own neighbourhood.”

“Madam Wickset!—What should *she* know of character, unless of a housemaid or footboy? I tell you that Sir Richard’s great great grandfather was nigh being strung up as an accomplice in the Gunpowder Plot.—’Tis written in history, and any one may read it there that likes; and ’twill never surprise *me* to find that Matty’s husband and his old Jesuit of a chaplain have been following in the same steps; and if they’ve any such scheme in their head, the first person they’re likely to make away with, will be the nearest Protestant they can lay hands on!”—

“This is really too absurd!” cried Elizabeth, perceiving that the old gentleman was ready to hazard any extravagant accusation to stir up the

wrath of her father against Norman. “As if in these times of publicity,—of newspapers and posthorses,—such crimes could be committed with impunity. Matilda, at eight-and-twenty, is not likely to be silenced like a child.”

“Silenced, indeed!—If you’d ever set foot at Manor House, Miss Betsy, you’d know, as we do, that the poor lass daren’t say her soul’s her own.—See what influence he has over her mind!—She has long ceased to care the scratch of her little finger for the whole lot of her family packed together. Nevertheless, she’s your father’s child still, though an undutiful;—and I maintain that ’tis his business to prevent her being spirited off out of the country!—”

“Surely, Mr. Cruttenden, my sister may be allowed a little excursion of pleasure without exciting all these ridiculous suppositions!” cried Elizabeth, angrily.

“I see nothing ridiculous in the matter, Miss Betsy. ’Tis my duty as an honest man to put your father on his guard.—If once his daughter settles in Papist parts, there’s an end of poor Matty. I dare say Sir Richard means no harm

beforehand. I dare say the journey is only one of the blessed economy-schemes which cause people of quality to starve abroad upon soup meagre, and fancy they are living cheap. I'll tell you how we'll settle it, Maule. You must come down with something handsome, and post over to Selwood to make them give up the plan; and as far as a few hundreds of my own will help the matter, they're heartily at Matty's service. 'Twill only be so much the less in young Crutt's legacy-duty hereafter."

Such were the judicious motives which had brought Mr. Maule uninvited into Worcester-shire; and having no time to waste in circumlocution, he came straight to the point with Sir Richard Norman.

"I don't like the thoughts of Matty's going to settle among Papists and foreigners," said he, abruptly. "Tom Cruttenden's of opinion, Sir Richard, that, may be, you are going out of the kingdom in such a jiffy only for want of a little ready money. If that's the case, name the sum you mean to economize in the course of the next twelve months, and here's a blank

cheque on my banker ready to be filled up with the amount."

"There are other motives in the world, Sir, than pounds, shillings, and pence,—whatever you may think to the contrary!"—cried Sir Richard, justly indignant at the liberty taken with his proceedings. "I trust I am free to regulate my family affairs without reference to the whims of Mr. Cruttenden, of whose name I hope to hear no further mention in my house.—It is my determination, meanwhile, that Lady Norman shall embark with me next week for the continent; and reside with me there so long as may suit our mutual convenience and pleasure."

Fortunately for old Maule's forbearance, Sir Richard quitted the room after giving utterance to this terrific denunciation; and it was to Matilda alone that the father unfolded the tale of his terrors, and poured forth his vials of wrath.

"There is no longer peace or confidence under this roof, Matty," said the old gentleman, in a piteous tone; "such glances never passed betwixt me and your poor, dear, dead and gone mother, as I saw cast at you just now by Sir

Richard Norman. God send you safe through it all. If the marriage were to do again, Joseph Maule would cut off his right hand sooner than give you to that hard-hearted, arrogant man."

"Then you would be guilty of an act of cruel kindness," cried Matilda, distracted between the fury of her husband and the resentment of her father; "for of all men living, Norman is the only one I could regard with the affection and duty of a wife."

"You are telling a monstrous untruth, either to me or yourself, child," exclaimed old Maule, with indignation. "Accustomed to deceive others, you have begun to deceive yourself. I remember the day when a falsehood would have expired upon your lips. But times are sadly altered now, Matty—times are sadly altered; and, as Tom Cruttenden says, there'll be a worse before there's a better. I'd fain have had you meet it here, among your own kith and kin. But 'twas not to be. You must take your own way. You've deserted your father's house, your father's faith; you must now desert your father's country. My blessing will go with you, Lady

Norman, wherever you be. But mark my words at parting,—you will live to repent in sackcloth and ashes the day you gave yourself up to the influence of one whose heart is as hard as a stone, and whose soul the property of his priest.”

Matilda trembled as she listened. There was an earnestness in her father’s manner which she had never noticed before. She almost fancied that the old man’s eyes were suffused with tears. In vain did she strive by the tenderest protestations to soothe his irritation and compose his spirits; the main cause of his anxiety was not to be removed—she would not undertake to dissuade Sir Richard from passing the winter abroad.

“In that case, my errand here is at an end,” was the old gentleman’s fretful reply. “I have fulfilled my duty as a father; a daughter’s duty seems to concern you no longer. Farewell, Matty!—farewell, my unhappy child!—Let us hear of your welfare; your sisters will take care that you hear of ours in return.”

The old gentleman departed in his ire, and Matilda resigned herself to her sorrow. Brief

as was his visit, it had served to aggravate the troubles of his daughter. Everybody seemed leagued against her. The Ravenscrofts embittered her departure by their tenderness; Sir Richard and her own family by their cruelty. She was glad when the day arrived for a change of scene, air, and reflections.

CHAPTER VII.

N'est on pas las d'ambitious vulgaires,
De sots parés de pompeux sobriquets,
D'abus, d'erreurs, de rapines, de guerres,
De laquais-rois, de peuples de laquais ?—

BERANGER.

VARIOUS are the sonnets that have been edited by the home-sick and muse-sick of these metrical times, in honour of the cliffs of Dover, and the emotions to which their aspect gives rise. It may be doubted, however, whether, of the favoured few not overpowered in quitting their native land by sickness of a less poetical description, there exist many who experience any other feeling than satisfaction in quitting England for the Continent.

Lady Norman, at least, was one of the fortunate majority, whose cares seem to diminish with every mile of the onward journey. Sir Richard became less irritable from the moment of quitting home. The estrangement between him and Matilda was less apparent to themselves and others; and on perceiving that the delight expressed by his wife in the succession of novel objects presented to her view was genuine and unaffected, he resumed his ease in her presence. Naturally light-hearted, Matilda, in the midst of new scenes and strange faces, regained the expansive joyousness of her better days; and satisfied that she was not acting a part, *he* too ceased to be an actor.

They arrived in Paris, cheerful in each other's company, prepared to be amused and to amuse. A gay little hotel, "*entre cour et jardin*," was engaged for them in the Rue de Provence, where a separate suite of apartments being assigned to the Abbé O'Donnel, Lady Norman was to be relieved from the constraint of his presence. Paris abounded that winter in gay society, culled from the wealthy of every aristo-

cracy in Europe; and independent of Sir Richard's high connexions among the Roman-catholic nobility, of whom numbers had hastened to the Continent, Matilda was furnished with a variety of letters of introduction, by the Countess of Farleigh, to French families of distinction with whom she had formed an intimacy during her visit to Paris after the Peace of Amiens.

Her ladyship's friendships, however, lay chiefly among the legitimate nobility of the *ancien régime*; and the Normans considered themselves fortunate that accident had secured them *another* avenue into circles whereon the setting sun of the glory of Napoleon still cast a refulgent reflection; and from which the English, as his fiercest enemies, were scrupulously excluded. A letter from Mrs. Ravenscroft to Admiral Guerchant, who, as prisoner of war to her gallant husband, had incurred obligations to the family, ensured a cordial welcome to Matilda. Under the auspices of the Admiral's excellent wife, she was as frankly initiated into the most secret sanctuaries of Bonapartism as under the hand and seal of Lady Farleigh into the clique

of ultras and noble emigrants regilding the tarnished royalty of the château.

On all sides, the Normans, rich, young, handsome, and agreeable, were hailed as additions to society. The English were still novelties in Paris. They had not yet worn out the patience of their hosts by the ostentation of their pomps and vanities, their vast superciliousness, their narrowness of mind ; and among the London beauties and celebrities contending that winter for distinction, not one obtained a more heartfelt tribute of admiration from the French, than the fair, gentle, unpretending Lady Norman.

Matilda had none of the hard, repellent, self-sufficiency of a woman of fashion,—no strong prejudices, no personal conceit ; and her readiness in adopting the hours, customs, and fashions of a society (the first of any magnitude in which she had moved) passed for a virtue with the Parisians. She was simplicity itself ; simplicity, which, of all qualifications, is the most acceptable to persons highly artificial ; and just as the plaudits of the world are known to develop the talents of a timid actor, the favour with

which she was received tended to heighten the charms of her manners and conversation. Even Sir Richard was startled at the display of youthful loveliness to which habit had lately rendered him insensible, enhanced as it was by the elegance of a Parisian toilet, and animated by the rapturous admiration of Parisian society. The English beauties were amazed to find their pretentious charms eclipsed by those of a person so obscure. Already, she was exciting jealousy among those accustomed to excite the jealousy of others.

“What a lovely creature is that Lady Norman!”—observed Lady Arthur D. to Lady Dawlish,—one of the most exclusive of English exclusives, just then established in all the pride of Tory favour at the Tuileries, in rivalry with the Grammonts, Polignacs, Damas, Duras, Blacas, and all the other *as-ses* returned from emigration to renew the odiousness of favouritism in the eyes of the nation.

“Lady *Catherine* Norman, you mean,—my cousin Roscrea’s daughter?”

“No,—I mean simply Lady Norman.”

“ *What* Lady Norman?”—

“ The wife of a Worcestershire baronet. Did you not notice her last night, at Madame de Montmorency’s ball? So much delicacy of complexion—so much freshness—so much taste!”

“ Never heard of the woman in my life.—”

“ But you have *seen* her, my dear Lady Dawlish.—Your son was trying to persuade her to waltz last night——”

“ Frank Villiers try to persuade anybody to do anything!—”

“—when the duchess came and carried him off in triumph.”

“ I remember seeing something fair in a white satin dress, that looked like an Englishwoman, to which Villiers was smiling and shewing his teeth; but her face was new to me, and I asked no questions. New English faces do not suit me, unless of girls in their first season. One knows every one one *ought* to know,—one knows every one *worth* knowing.”

“ Lady Norman, I assure you, is particularly worth knowing. *Elle fait fureur!*”

“ Exactly,—that is just the sort of thing one

hates,—an effort, a scene, an event. In my opinion, everything out of the common way is a *supplice*.”

“ There is nothing out of the way in Lady Norman. She would be a great acquisition to your *clique*.”

“ It is my rule to make no new acquaintance. Where can she have lived all her life, that one never heard of her ?”

“ In an old family seat in the country ;—a very different thing, you know, from moving in a bad set in town !—”

“ They are people of family, then ?—What relation to the man who married my relation, Lady Catherine ?”

“ Cousin, or something of that sort, I suppose ; for they are all Roman Catholics together.”

“ Catholics ?—Indeed !—Persons of some standing, perhaps, in their way.—I had a vague sort of unfavourable impression about a Sir Richard and Lady Norman. I fancied there was something of *parvenu* in the case. However, my dear Lady Arthur, since they are connected

with Lady Catherine, and *you* are good enough to interest yourself about them, you may bring them to my Thursday evenings."

"They are not the sort of people to be *taken* anywhere. Sir Richard is armed cap-a-pee in the punctilious pride of a country baronet. The first time we all meet at the Château, I will present Lady Norman to you; you can send cards, *et c'est une affaire faite.*"

"They are not worth half so much trouble," replied Lady Dawlish, listlessly; "but just as you please. One likes to have a few decent English faces at one's house, to shew to the French by way of apology for the monstrous creatures calling themselves our country people, who beset their streets and galleries."

Little suspecting on what terms her acquaintance was accepted, Lady Norman submitted to be presented to the fashionable Countess by Lady Arthur D., to whom she had brought a *billet* of introduction from Lady Emily Farleigh; and, thus stamped current among the *élite* by being seen in conversation for some seconds with a woman who, like a drum, made

a noise in the world proportionate to her hollowness and emptiness, she was courted on all sides by her compatriots.

It was surprising, meanwhile, with what readiness Sir Richard—at home so reserved—lent himself to the tide of popularity and distinction now setting in upon them. Every night, save those devoted to the Italian opera, they joined some brilliant assembly. He encouraged her to gaiety and dissipation. He reminded her that, in Paris, she was deprived of the fireside comforts cheering the seclusion of Selwood Manor; and needed no reminding that, in Paris, he was safe from the mortifications arising from his political annihilation.

Between breakfast and dinner, the Normans seldom met. Sir Richard probably devoted his mornings to literary researches or the public monuments of the capital. But Matilda had many intimate associates to beguile the moments of his absence; among whom were his relation, Mrs. Lockwood, a fashionable beauty on the wane, devoted to the mysteries of the toilet; and Madame la Comtesse de Montrond, a fashion-

able *intrigante* on the ascendant, devoted to the mysteries of the state. By the former she was constantly compelled to consultations with Leroy and Victorine, Herbault, Lubin, or Nattier; by the latter, pinned mercilessly down, to be cross-examined for the political *on dits*, which it was the honourable cue of Madame de Montrond to gather from the distinguished foreign circles in Paris, for the benefit or recreation of Louis le Gros.

While saluted by the fashion-mongers of the Faubourg St. Honoré as *la perle des perles*,—*la blonde des blondes*,—the darling of all hearts and eyes,—Matilda's merits obtained higher favour amid the dignified sobriety of the Faubourg St. Germain, than those of her pseudo-patronesses, Lady Dawlish and Lady Arthur D. Matilda could converse, which the latter could *not*; Matilda could listen, which the former could *not*;—she was a more welcome companion than either in a society, in which *la causette* is the leading business of life.

But though dazzled for a time by the glancing of the fire-flies of fashion, and the out-

spread peacock-tails of aristocratic grandeur, Matilda was often glad to escape from both, to the old-fashioned hotel in Place Royale, to which Admiral Guerchant had retired, on the downfall of the Emperor and the cessation of his ministerial functions, with his homely parents—the type of his original obscurity,—his worthy, active, intelligent wife—the type of his energetic career,—and his accomplished children—the type of the honours to which it had elevated his old age.—Though suffering deeply from the ruin of their cause and prospects, the Guerchants maintained their habits of cheerfulness and modest hospitality. Matilda found collected round their fire-side, the political, military, and literary celebrities of those gorgeous times; the *savans*, whose efforts had been fostered by the liberality of Napoleon; the artists and heroes, whose achievements had been crowned by his hand; rays still emanating from the brightness of his glory. She rejoiced in meeting these people, in hearing them converse, in finding them render the tribute of honour and affection to the fallen man, whom

it was the pitiful policy of England to vilify and depreciate; and, whether as regarded its exemplary domestic union or its attraction as a rendezvous of the illustrious, the Hotel Guerchant was a spot from which Lady Norman never returned without interest and edification.

It was *there* only that she heard Frenchwomen converse without affectation, and saw them obtain from the opposite sex the respect due to rational beings. It was there only she beheld the sober interests of a progressing intelligence, exalted above the trivial distinctions of society. She was not, however, blind in her partiality. Vanity, ambition, and egotism, existed as much among the partizans of the imperial as of the royal crown of France; the same lust of place, the same hankering after an inch of ribbon, or an ell of emblazoned parchment. The worshippers of the God Fo were nearly as idolatrous as those of the God Fum.

But the ermined skirts of the new aristocracy were still radiant with the glories by which they had been ennobled. The laurel-crowns to which she rendered homage, encircled the very brows

they had been woven to illustrate. The honour and glory were immediate and identical; not legendary,—not traditional,—not to be taken upon trust.—The waters were fresh from the sacred fountain,—not drivelled through centuries of drought and stagnation. The swords were scarcely sheathed which had carved those records of fame,—not rusted through ages of inglorious sloth. At the Tuileries, her respect was demanded for dukes and field marshals, because their ancestors had fought with Bayard, or legislated with Sully. At the house of Admiral Guerchant, her respect was willingly conceded to dukes and field-m Marshals, by whom kingdoms had been conquered or pacificated, and England itself condemned to burn its midnight oil in privy councils and public debates.

The greatest charm, however, of the admiral's fire-side was its unpretending family affection. The sacred charities of domestic life had been fostered both by the precept and example of Napoleon; and immorality, driven discountenanced from his court, had only lately found time to uplift her head from the mire, adorn it

with paint and perfume, and amble her way back to the luxurious saloons of the great. Matilda delighted in the simple old peasant-mother of the admiral, reversing the laws of nature and venerating her excellent son ; in the cordial wife, the graceful daughters. Nor was the unaffected admiration of the young Englishwoman commended to their regard by the widow of the gallant Ravenscroft without value in their estimation. Elsewhere, Lady Norman commanded homage ; at the Hotel of the Place Royale, she obtained personal regard.

What a change in all these varied scenes and societies from the obscurity of Selwood Manor !—What a difference between this triumphant career, and the tea-drinkings of Selwood Vicarage, or an occasional formal dinner-party at Farleigh Castle !—Matilda had not courage to relate the history of her daily and nightly enjoyments to Sophy Ravenscroft, lest her letters should render her young friend discontented with her monotonous seclusion. She admitted only that she was supremely happy ; without stating how much of her felicity was

owing to the altered demeanour of Sir Richard, (who now seemed only anxious to atone for his past harshness by the obsequiousness of his attentions;) or how much to the absence of the Abbé O'Donnel, who had suddenly departed for Rome, on a mission to the Propaganda from the community in which he had recently re-inrolled himself.—She did not even attempt to excite the interest of Sophia by describing the wistful looks of compassion she had detected in the eyes of the old man, when he bade her adieu. Perhaps the Abbé fancied that he should see that young and lovely face no more;—or perhaps he experienced a remorseful pang of fatherly pity, in beholding a being so fair, so guileless, so inexperienced, surrounded for the first time by the snares of a flattering and deceitful world.—

CHAPTER VIII.

Now hoist the sail and let the streamers float
Upon the wanton breezes. Strew the deck
With lavender, and sprinkle liquid sweets,
That no rude savour maritime invade
The nose of nice nobility! Breathe soft,
Ye clarionets, and softer still, ye flutes!
That winds and waters, lulled by magic sounds,
May bear us smoothly to the Gallic shore.

COWPER.

It was now the carnival. Paris was alive with one of those fever fits of excitement which render the Parisians such ready tools for a revolution, such ready fools for a masked ball. The courtiers of the Tuileries, laying aside for a time their vainglory,—the partizans of the *petit corporal*, forgetting for a moment their

despondency, resigned themselves to the enjoyment of *bals masqués* and carnival adventures. Every night had its ball or fête:—English dukes, foreign ambassadors, Russian princes, Turkish envoys, vying with each other in the splendour of their entertainments. Lady Dawlish and Lady Arthur promenaded their ennui listlessly through the brilliant throng; Mrs. Lockwood lived in a perpetual course of cosmetics; while Madame de Montrond, who fancied that momentous reports for the King's cabinet were to be gathered in those temples of echo where English lords and magnificos of Muscovy lounged together over their sorbets, (discoursing of Merino sheep, prize-fighting, fox-hunting, sledging, opera dancers, and rouge et noir,) carried her diamond tiara from ball-room to ball-room, glittering over the emptiest head that ever aspired to diplomatic renown, from the Neuskoï Prospect to Stable Yard.

Meanwhile, Sir Richard Norman, flattered by the triumphs of a wife to whom such triumphs were indifferent, took care that the splendours of Matilda's appearance at the court-

fêtes, should not be eclipsed by those of the most gorgeous of her country women. But except when they repaired together to these scenes of diversion, the Normans saw little of each other.

His mornings were devoted to researches among the public archives and manuscripts of the royal library, for important documents which he wished to recover connected with the interests of his family and church; while hers were trifled away by the intrusions and encroachments of her fashionable friends.

Escaping one day (after a night spent *au bal de l'opéra, en partie fine* with fifty of the most talkative gossips of Paris) from her crowded saloon, Lady Norman directed her coachman to drive to the Place Royale. Her evening engagements had latterly detained her from the Guerchants' pleasant circle; and she wished to prove to her kind friends that she was not forgetful as well as negligent. To her surprise, an air of unusual gaiety seemed to animate the dreary old Hotel. Remote from the fooleries of the carnival, neither masquerade nor *bœuf gras*

could be the origin of its mirth;—yet the tone of both the Admiral and his lady seemed inspired by some unavowed good fortune. Matilda sympathized with their cheerfulness without troubling herself to divine the cause; and was gratified when the Admiral, on leading her back to her carriage, thanked her, with cordial courtesy, for having remembered her obscure friends among the engagements of so gay a season.

“A time may come,” said he, as he pressed her hand at parting, “when my devoted services will prove how highly we esteem the friend of our English captain’s widow for *his* sake, and how truly we love her for her own.

There was something unaccountable to Lady Norman—something almost affecting—in this effusion of sentiment on the part of the rough old commander, the strong-minded old statesman; and she leant back in a corner of her carriage, as it wound rapidly along the crowded Boulevarts, revolving the origin and intention of the Admiral’s affectionate apostrophe.—When, lo! just at the junction of the Rue Cerutti, a

sudden crash startled her from her reverie, and she found herself in close contact with a plain dark chariot, in which, the blinds being partially drawn down, she was enabled by her reclining position to discern the person of her husband.

How slight the incident,—yet how mysterious!—Sir Richard—like most men of his age, an abhorrer of closed carriages—driving in a stuffy chariot along the Boulevarts, at a moment when he had announced himself pledged to attend an interesting debate in the *Chambre des Députés*!—What could be the meaning of this?

“What business had he there at such a time?”

To catch a second glimpse and place her suspicions beyond a doubt, was out of the question. Much as she longed to ascertain whether the companion with whom he was engaged in eager discourse, were male or female, it was impossible. The chariot had the start of her by fifty yards, and, though her

heart was bursting with impatience, she thought it beneath her dignity to issue orders to quicken their pace;—the servants having, perhaps, been as quicksighted as herself in detecting their master.

Resolved, however, to keep the mysterious chariot as long as possible in sight, and perceiving that it was proceeding towards the Place Louis XV., she desired the coachman to drive to the Champs Elysées; where, as she was in the frequent habit of alighting for a quiet walk, her presence would excite no surprise.

Poor Matilda's project was successful. So far as the Avenue de Neuilly, she kept the carriage in view; nothing doubting that it would pursue the road to the Bois de Boulogne, whither she could still follow without provoking comment or suspicion;—when, just as they reached the turning towards Chaillot, her carriage stopped suddenly, and the ever-smiling face of Lady Dawlish's coxcombical son, Colonel Villiers, presented itself at the open window,

from which she had been watching the equipage of the delinquent.

“ Good morning, Lady Norman,” said he. “ Seen my mother to-day?—Hope you are not going to the Bois—eh?—Just come from riding there with the Lockwoods. An East wind cuts like a carving knife!—”

“ *Miladi veut-elle bien descendre faire sa promenade?*”—demanded the footman, opening the opposite door, on conceiving (as it was natural for a Parisian lackey to conceive) that Miladi, having met her handsome young countryman, had accomplished her rendezvous, and was ready for a walk.

“ Going to walk, eh?”—said Villiers, giving his horse to his groom.—“ A most unexpected pleasure!—Fortunate that you happened to meet me, eh?—Quite right to prefer the Champs Elysées to the *Bois*!—*Bois* detestable in windy weather, eh?—*Bois* always excruciating, either from mud or dust.—”

Provoked to be thus pestered with a popinjay, Lady Norman had no patience to reply.

But Colonel Villiers, who was blest with the tongue of a ready talker, shuffled on by her side, without the slightest intermission of gossip. He could converse, as the ropewalkers work, backwards or forwards with equal facility.

“ Charming ball at Madame de Goutaut’s last night, eh?—*Not* charming?—No! Quite agree with you.—A horrid mixture, eh?—*Parquet* waxed to a fault. Slippery as the *Mer de Glace*!—Might as well have waltzed upon enamel, eh? First dance, quite a collar-bone run, eh?—Three purls in ten minutes! Only one?—True; I fancy there was but one. Should be an *ordonnance* against the English waltzing!—So used to their own cursed vulgar chalked floors, that they can’t make out a *parquet*, eh?—Not ten oak-floors in London, eh? Obligated to daub their half-planed deals with chalk to hide the nakedness of the land, and waltz like snails in a lethargy, to prevent stumbling over the boards, eh?—Wonder whether French dances will ever take at Almack’s, eh?—Lady Hampden tried them to amuse the Regent, and they

were coughed down. Do you costume yourself for this thing at the Duc de Berri's, eh?—*Not a bal masqué?*—True; a *carrousel de salon*, I fancy, with pasteboard horses and daggers of lath!—”

As Colonel Villiers waited for no replies to his vocable notes of interrogation, it was easy for Matilda to give her thoughts to her cares, while she seemed to listen to his rapid chit-chat; and every moment her wonder increased concerning the motives of Sir Richard's self-concealment. With a sudden impulse of jealousy, she passed in review the whole catalogue of her female acquaintance, without calling to mind a single one to whom her husband had devoted marked attentions. He was not, in fact, a lady's man. Whatever the course of his fiery youth, his middle age was manifestly too wayward for silken bondage. Sir Richard Norman was one of the many Englishmen uncivilized enough to prefer political argument to even the largest small-talk, and a glass of claret to the sweetest *eau sucrée*. He was addicted to field-sports, agriculture, argumentation, and a meerschäum,—the man least

qualified on earth to caper nimbly in a lady's chamber, and the least likely to devote a chilly January day to turtle-doveship among the leafless groves and windy alleys of the Bois de Boulogne.

“Horrid sight! Poor Madame de Rohan last night, in her spangled turban, eh?”—continued Villiers, not noticing her pre-occupation, and, hearing nothing but his own voice, he decided Lady Norman to be an agreeable conversational woman. “Poor soul thinks it right to remind the *château* of the length of time she was excruciated in emigration, by affecting to speak broken French, and adhere to the vulgarisms of Grosvenor square, eh?—Delightful to hear the Faubourg shriek out when they see her attired in the style of Gyngell's figurantes—“*Ah! cette chère Madame de Rohan! Voyez un peu tout ce qu'elle a du souffrir en Angleterre!—ça fait pitié de la voir promener ses martyres!—*”

At that moment, Matilda, who was pacing on unheeding, absorbed in her own reflections,

found her steps suddenly impeded by the struggles of a child, a fine little boy, with whom she had come in contact as he was sporting along the causeway.

“ Poor little fellow !—I trust he is not hurt !” —cried she, lifting him up before the *bonne*, who was at some distance, could approach them. “ *Tu ne t’es pas blessé, n’est ce pas, mon petit chéri ?* ”—she continued, attempting to embrace the child.

“ Put me down—Don’t kiss me—Don’t talk French to me—I am English !”—cried the sturdy little fellow. And Matilda, perceiving that his lip was cut by the fall, could not but admire his spirit and energy and envy the mother of so promising a son.

“ Noble boy, ’pon honour !” exclaimed Colonel Villiers, surveying him through his glass. “ I present you with my *cravâche*, my little man, as a reward for your heroism—eh ?”

“ I don’t want your whip,” retorted the child. “ Mamma says I am not to accept presents from strangers.”

“And what is your name?” inquired Matilda, perceiving that the nurse, who had now rejoined them, was a foreigner.

“My name is Norman.”

“A namesake of your ladyship? A monopolizer of excellences!” said Villiers, with an ineffable smile; and as he stooped forward to bestow a condescending caress upon the boy Lady Norman suddenly found her husband by her side!—Confused by such a startling succession of incidents, she coloured deeply; nor was her distress diminished on noticing the indignant expression of his countenance.

“How are you, Norman?”—demanded the graceful Colonel, unobservant of their embarrassment. “Just run down a little namesake of yours, whose beauty does honour to the family—eh?—”

“A namesake of *mine*?” inquired Sir Richard, regarding the noble child with a degree of admiration that for a moment overmastered his displeasure at finding Matilda tête-à-tête with the Colonel of many conquests.

“Will you kiss this gentleman?” demanded

Lady Norman of the child, relieved from the suspicions she had momentarily entertained.

“No!—I don’t like him—Let me go to my nurse. Hallo!” cried the child, interrupting himself, as he caught sight of Lady Norman’s equipage, drawn up beside the path—“*Manette! Voilà ma voiture qui m’attend. Montons!—*”

“It is *not* your carriage, Sir!—Run on, and do not trouble the lady,” replied the attendant, in her native language.

“I tell you it *is* mine, or my papa’s,” persisted the boy. “Whatever you see, Manette, marked with those two pictures upon it—a golden star, and a soldier’s hand with a battle-axe—belongs to *us*. Mamma told me so the other day. This is our carriage, and I choose to get into it;—I am tired.”

“And who is Mamma—eh?” inquired Colonel Villiers.

“What is that to *you*?” demanded the arrogant little pea-chick, so early trained in the vainglorious paths of heraldry.

“*Madame se nomme milédi Cathérine de Noremann,*” interrupted the *bonne*, scandalized

at the ill-manners of her charge, whom she now bore away undetained, for both Sir Richard and Matilda had received a shock not readily to be overcome.

“It is too cold to walk!” said he, turning towards the carriage; and having hastily handed in his wife, he followed, kissing his hand in abrupt adieu to the gallant Colonel, who had no alternative but to remount his horse, and ride off.

For some minutes, silence prevailed between the parties; but as they retraversed the Boulevards to return home, Matilda could not refrain from remarking—“I fancied I met you here, an hour ago, in a chariot with the blinds half drawn?—”

But Norman was apparently too much engrossed by his own thoughts to hear or heed her observation. “How on earth came you to enter into conversation with that child?”—was the first observation that escaped his lips.

“He met with an accident through my heedlessness, and was too brave to complain. I never saw a finer little fellow!”

“Damn him !”—muttered Sir Richard, with a degree of bitterness such as he had not betrayed since his departure from Selwood Manor. “No doubt that cursed prying woman of a nurse will go home and tell the Normans that we have been cross-questioning the child. A fine triumph for *them* !—A pretty history they will make of it !—And that puppy Villiers, too, standing by, pretending not to know the child ;—his own cousin, and dining constantly, as he does, with the parents !—”

“Rely upon it, Colonel Villiers knows and cares nothing about Mr. Norman’s prospect of succeeding to your estate,” said Matilda, by way of consolation. “I dare say he thinks we have a nursery full of children of our own ; or, more probably still, thinks nothing about the matter.—”

“I am not ass enough to imagine, as you would insinuate, that the whole world is interested in my family affairs !”—cried the irritated Sir Richard. “But that Giles Norman *does* make the heirship presumptive of his son to my

estate a subject of perpetual vaunt, I have good reason to know. Giles Norman is a vulgar-minded fellow, inflated with notions of his family consequence; and I entertain no doubt that Villiers is at this moment enjoying a laugh with him over our mortification!—”

“The ineffable Colonel Villiers would be shocked at the idea of enjoying so barbarous a thing as a laugh,” said Lady Norman, unwilling to see her husband’s vexation in a serious light. “I dare say he has returned to escort Mrs. Lockwood through that wilderness of monkeys, the Bois de Boulogne, without troubling himself further about us.”

But her husband would neither smile nor be appeased. All that evening, he resembled the Sir Richard Norman of Selwood Manor, far more than the Sir Richard Norman of the Pavillon Marsan, or the Salle des Maréchaux.

But his self-love had deeper mortifications in store. Sir Richard, on his arrival in Paris, had been elated—more elated, perhaps, than became his honourable descent — by the distinctions vouchsafed him by the royal family, and the

ecclesiastical dignitaries of Paris. And lo ! the very next time he had the honour of an invitation from the Cardinal Archbishop, he found, on entering the dreary apartments of the palace, that Mr. Norman was also among the guests ; nay, that as a kinsman *he* had been invited to do especial honour to the new comer !—

To enter into the pitiful detail of his family differences to his Eminence, was impossible. A Judas-like bow of ceremony was accordingly exchanged between the cousins ; and the august prelate took occasion, in the course of the evening, to express to Sir Richard his satisfaction in having made the acquaintance of so distinguished a member of the Norman family, and the Catholic church, as his cousin Giles.

Next night, Matilda and her husband were included in one of those select parties at the Château which, as they comprehended twenty foreigners to a single Frenchman, were already beginning to make the restored family unpopular with their own party ; the King being perpetually surrounded with English, Russ, or Prussian uniforms,—the Duchesse

d'Angouleme with London exclusives, or the ex-divinities of Alexander the Little. Distinguished on all occasions by the notice of Madame, Matilda, after the usual compliments of reception, found herself wistfully congratulated by the Dauphinless Duchess, upon the extreme beauty of her children; who had attracted the notice of his Majesty some weeks before, while playing in the park of St. Cloud. Painful as it was to explain in presence of the silent circle, and still more in presence of Sir Richard, the real state of the case, Matilda faltered with a blush that "she was not so fortunate as to be a mother; and that the children to whom her Royal Highness alluded were those of a distant relative."

"Ah! you have relatives, then, in Paris?"—said the Duchess, grieved to have inflicted pain on such a subject. "You must do me the favour to make them known to me, the earliest opportunity."

Fortunately, Madame de Montrond was at hand to explain, with the eternal smile and universal knowledge of a lady in waiting, that

milédi Cathérine Normann had already been presented "*aux bontés de la famille royale par Madame la Comtesse de Dollish.*" Nothing remained for the Duchess to suggest, but that she trusted the next time milédi Normann visited the Château, she would be accompanied by her "*aimable parente, milédi Cathérine.*"

CHAPTER IX.

Son superbe dégoût,
Ses fiers dédains, fuyaient et blamaient tout ;—
On l'appelait la belle impertinente.
Or, admirez la faiblesse des gens !
Plus elle était distraite, exigeante,
Plus ils tâchaient par des soins complaisans
D'appivoiser son humeur méprisante.

VOLTAIRE.

THE natural timidity of character arising from her inexperience of the world being hourly increased by the morbid sensitiveness of her husband, Matilda fancied that Lady Catherine Norman would be as much annoyed as herself by the awkward position in which they were placed by these misunderstandings.

But it would have required some wholly un-

precedented event to disturb the self-possession of the confident, dashing Lady Catherine Norman. Everything Lady Catherine said or did, was hard, or hardened. She rode hard, she looked hardened; her handsome person and aquiline nose seeming to afford her a privilege of hardihood and dictation beyond the charter of her sex. Instead of being embarrassed, she was *amused* at being thus brought into contact with the Normans of Selwood Manor. Her husband's heirship to their title and estate had been one of his chief recommendations to her favour; and having been informed by him that the Baronet had originally quarrelled with her father-in-law for not choosing to sanction his marriage with a young woman of inferior condition, she prepared herself to look down and talk down the presumptuous *parvenue*, whenever they should be thrown together.

Lady Catherine's parents, the Earl and Countess of Roscrea, were Tory grandees of the first class,—bigots in religion, politics, and the ethics of social life. Accustomed to hear the law laid down from the petty throne of her mother's

drawing-room, till she fancied herself entitled to lay it down in her turn, Lady Catherine had assumed the right to pronounce upon administrations and hierarchies, and as audaciously as if any syllable she uttered were deserving the attention of a reasonable being.

Nevertheless, her august proportions and personal presumption, backed by connexions equally presumptuous and lofty, imposed upon the multitude. The well-bred bowed assent to her verbose harangues, — the patient bore with her absolutism, — the timid shrunk from her impertinence, — till by degrees she came to fancy herself oracular! — To repay her own concession in allying herself with an anathematized Papist, she had exacted the retirement of Giles Norman from commercial pursuits; and their prospects in life thus destroyed, they had been living ever since their marriage on the allowance made him by his father and the interest of her ladyship's ladyship-like fortune, — an income that exactly sufficed to defray their dress, equipage, and opera-box, leaving the necessaries of life to chance and post obits.

Nevertheless, as the Normans made an excellent appearance in the world and the world was delighted to enter them on its list of friends, they formed a brilliant variety in the insect tribes volant in London, and became exclusive among the exclusives.

Inexplicable is the force of certain filmy bonds which society has been pleased to enweave, as if expressly for its enthrallment ! The silly bird is not more easily charmed in an imaginary circle, than the English *beau monde* by any gibberish incantation which impostors of a certain standing are bold enough to pronounce. Lady Catherine Norman belonged in London to what was termed "Lady Dawlish's set;" and there was nothing indecorous, vulgar, or unfeeling, which "Lady Dawlish's set" had not privileged itself to do with impunity. They had decreed themselves infallible, and society submitted to the decree. It was useless for people of higher rank, fortune, sense, accomplishments, or beauty, to say, "I am not one of them, but I am something *more* !" The knowing ones had surrounded their lists

with impregnable barriers, against which the excluded were constantly pressed forward, and by which they were constantly driven back; and before the close of the season, the insurgents invariably owned themselves defeated. Lady Dawlish sat omnipotent on her throne; while Lady Catherine, stationed as Lady Chamberlain at her side, looked down, wand in hand, upon the fruitless struggles of the disaffected courtiers!—

The triflers thus self-erected into a tribunal, naturally imagined that the power so absolute in that favoured spot of earth whose dust is weighed by golden pennyweights, and whose area measured by a twelve-inch ivory rule, must maintain universal authority; and Lady Catherine arrived in Paris believing that her sneers were to tarnish the renown of statesmen, and her averted glances to drive some unoffending woman from society, as in supercilious, superficial, hyper-fashionable London!— But at the first wave of her wand, she discovered that its virtue was departed.

On giving utterance to one of her incoherent

political rhapsodies, oracular in Grosvenor Square, she was entreated by the intelligent French auditors to whom it purported to dictate, to condescend to explain the *meaning* of her words;—and when she asserted to a lofty coterie in the Faubourg Germain, that Lady Norman was “a person not in society—a person whom nobody knew,” she was answered with naïf simplicity that “the Lady Norman she stated to be her distant connexion, might not be in society; but that *their* Lady Norman was the most charming of women, received at the château, and honoured with the favour of Madame.”

To throw a chill over this misplaced enthusiasm, Lady Catherine tried the effect of one of her icy sneers; surveying the offenders over her lofty nose, as though its shade were to regulate the world, like the gnomon of a sun dial. But it would not do. The *élégantes*, instead of being transfixed to stone, whispered among themselves that the air of the tall miladi was *emprunté*; and, deciding her to be very *gauche* and a *leetle* deaf, they turned round to welcome Matilda, who came among them gentle and unpretending,

talking in a strain they could understand, and as easy to conciliate as she was conciliating.

This failure was wormwood to Lady Catherine. Her sting was extracted,—her arrows rendered pointless.—She commanded no sympathy, unless from her husband; who had fancied that, in allying himself with a ladyship, he should astonish the world as much as he had astonished himself. He was indignant to find that he could no longer maintain his importance in society by leaning against the wall with a fastidious countenance, holding his tongue, hat, and cane,—too well-dressed to walk, too well-informed to talk, on any ordinary occasion. The empty airs by which the slavish world of London had been astounded, passed altogether unnoticed in Paris; and he was required to shew cause why he was to be attended to.

It was only through the beauty of his son, that he still contrived to inflict a pang upon his kinsman. At the children's balls, forming one of the numerous outlets of the vanity and luxury of the season, young Norman, with his clustering

curls and suit of crimson velvet and point, was the object of universal admiration ; while Matilda was sure to come in for her share of compliments on the loveliness of her supposed offspring. Lady Catherine had been so careful to spread the report that the boy was *heir* to Sir Richard Norman of Selwood Manor, that it was but natural strangers should conclude the child to be his son.

So often had this vexatious mistake occurred, that, when one night on entering the carriage, after having been singled out before fifty English people by the Duc de Berri with flatteries on the gallant appearance made in the Bois de Boulogne by young Norman and his Shetland pony, Sir Richard burst forth into exclamations against the mortification of his childless bed,—Matilda felt him to be almost justified. Hitherto, he had bewailed only the misfortune of having his estate inherited by the hateful Normans. He *now* spoke of children as the fairest ornaments of existence ;—the cheerers of a household,—the embellishment of home,—the best resource against old age.

“Then why,—since Providence denies us a child of our own,”—said Matilda, “why not adopt one?—Next to one’s own offspring, a child adopted from infancy must be the dearest thing on earth.”

“Are you serious?”—demanded Sir Richard, startled by this sudden proposal.

“Perfectly serious. Nothing would more conduce to my happiness.”

“You pledge me your word that you would adopt and educate as your own, some child whom we might mutually select for the purpose?—”

“Without hesitation. But it is from yourself that the pledge ought rather to be demanded; since it is *you* who must incur the expense and responsibility of the adoption.”

“Such has long been the dearest wish of my heart!” exclaimed Sir Richard.

“Then why keep it secret from me?”—cried Matilda. “Oh that you had been more explicit!—How many uneasy moments might have been spared us!—The company of a darling

little child would have so enlivened our dull fireside !”

“ It may do so still. We have, I trust, Matilda, years of happiness in store. I feel that we have hit upon the only expedient likely to confirm their perfect enjoyment.”

On parting for the night, her husband embraced her with a warmth of tenderness such as, for many months, had ceased to soften his demeanour towards her; and on the morrow, met her again at breakfast, in the highest spirits. A new life seemed dawning to his expectations. Joy sparkled in his eyes, and flurried his manner. Never had Matilda beheld him so elated.—He proposed a ride; he proposed a walk.—They dined *tête-à-tête*; and all that evening he remained a fixture, and a most welcome one, in Lady Norman’s opera box, full of chat, gallantry, and animation. He seemed desirous to thank her every moment for her concession to his wishes. A *parure* of rubies, which a few days before she had admired at Fossin’s, in presence of Mrs. Lockwood, was

lying on her toilet-table at her return from the opera ; nor would he accept her thanks for the costly gift.

“ You are indebted to Mrs. Lockwood,” said he, “ who reproached me last night at the Tuileries for having neglected *le jour des étrennes*, so carefully noted by the wives of Paris. You owe *me* nothing but a kiss of peace.”

For many succeeding days, Matilda was supremely happy. How different the effect produced upon her feelings by the vague adulation of the coteries of Paris—the homage of what she had justly termed “ the wilderness of monkeys ”—compared with the heart-soothing kindness of her husband. Instead of passing three-fourths of the day away from her, Sir Richard was now scarcely ever absent from home ; and when he chose, *who* could be such an agreeable companion as Sir Richard Norman ?—Even when she drove out he managed to accompany her, by proposing an expedition to the *bric à brac* warehouses of the Quai Voltaire, where at that time the most valuable antiquities, the

spoil of military booty in all the countries of Europe, were heaped together almost without consideration. He chose to have her opinion in the choice of a fine suite of bronze candelabra, which he was selecting for the hall at Selwood; and insisted upon presenting her with an exquisite panelling of Florentine mosaic for her favourite boudoir. He seemed chiefly intent upon the adornment and restoration of the Manor House.

“*Monsieur votre mari* seems to consider that the prospects of the great question are brightening in England?” observed Madame de Montrond, after having made her way for a morning visit through the encumbered vestibule of Matilda’s hotel.—“This will be charming news for the King!”

“It is long since I heard Sir Richard allude to the subject,” said Lady Norman. “Since the Abbé’s departure, he has interested himself little in politics.”

“But do you imagine that, unless the Emancipation question were safe, he would indulge

in all this expense for the enrichment of his estates?"

"Indeed, I think he would."

"I grieve to hear it!" cried Madame de Montrond, "for in that case his hasty purchases must arise from a suspicion that the state of affairs here is not permanent,—that the English have not long to remain in Paris. This will be sad news for the King. His Majesty relies implicitly on the political intelligence of foreigners of a certain rank."

"Not, I trust, including Sir Richard?" said Matilda, to whom the paltry jargon of an *intrigante* was almost unintelligible. "My husband is wholly indifferent to politics, foreign or domestic."

"*Ne vous y fiez pas!*"—cried Madame de Montrond, arranging the platings of her dress. "No man in his right senses *can* be indifferent to politics. Politics involve our whole existence,—influence the very air we breathe,—our eating, drinking, sleeping, loving, hating,—the universal tenour of our lives!"

"Sir Richard's life, believe me, runs smoothly

on, without a thought about the matter," persisted Matilda, with a smile. "He leaves the affairs of Europe to the providence of the Congress."

"My dear Madam, I happen to know beyond dispute that he is intimately connected with personages of importance attached to the cause of the usurper," whispered Madame de M.

"With Admiral Guerchant, I admit. But our intimacy has not the slightest political tendency."

"We do not trouble ourselves about the Admiral. The Admiral is a very honest man; but a *ganache*,—a *nullité*,—of whom we entertain no apprehension," cried the lady of the bedchamber.

"So much the better, for he is the only Bonapartist with whom we are acquainted," replied her companion, firmly.

"Your Ladyship must excuse me. I allude simply to Sir Richard Norman."

"We frequent the same society."

"No woman moves in precisely the same society as her husband. There must always be *liaisons* in which she cannot participate."

“In Sir Richard’s case, these lie entirely among his own countrymen. I often meet him riding with strangers; but they are Englishmen.”

“*Englishmen!*” retorted Madame de Montrond. And the silence with which that emphatic concluding syllable was received by Matilda, convinced her that the seeming artlessness of Lady Norman was only a piece of acting more consummate than her own.

Nevertheless, when the cabinet-councilress of the Bourbon court departed, leaving her to her meditations, Matilda could not but recal to mind the significant tone in which she had pronounced the word *liaisons!*—The peculiar smile of Madame de Montrond convinced her that Sir Richard had connexions of a nature not to be revealed to his wife; while her own experience assured her that they included a chocolate-coloured chariot, and a figure enwrappt in a cloak of richest sables. Her previous uneasiness on the subject returned. Her heart sank within her when she reflected how

unstable is the happiness based upon the sandy foundations of man's fidelity !—

The recent change in Sir Richard's deportment towards herself, induced her to hope that either her fears outstripped the truth, or that the indiscretions he might have been entangled in were giving way before the sacred influence of legitimate love. She determined not to discourage by petulance the returning steps of the wanderer. It would be her own fault were she to disturb by jealous resentments, the happy footing to which they were almost restored.

Since the night on which the project of adoption had been discussed between them, Sir Richard had reverted to it no more. But the solemn manner in which on that occasion he exhorted her to secrecy, even with her nearest friends, convinced her that he was not likely to abandon a scheme which he regarded so seriously. Alive to the delicacy of the subject as regarded herself, he was perhaps unwilling to pain her by allusions to it until his plans were

matured. Accustomed to make his will her law, she determined to wait in silence till it was his pleasure to take her into his confidence.

Meanwhile, their domestic tranquillity remained unimpaired, even by the insinuations of Madame de Montrond. Sir Richard was her constant companion; and it was evidently his desire to withdraw Matilda as much as possible from the brilliant vortex in which she was engaged. He was always suggesting excuses to detain her at home; nay, she sometimes fancied him annoyed at the homage with which she was beset by the fantastical Colonel Villiers.

The national habits of Paris were at that period disorganized by the strange innovations introduced by the wealthy and insolent of all nations; who, following in the van of the conquering army, had taken up their abode in its princely hotels, scattering their barbaric gold on all sides, and introducing customs which were those neither of their own country nor the country submitted to their usurpation.

One of the whims of the fashionable English

was to make dinner-parties *au cabaret*. Having noticed that the more eminent *restaurants* abounded no less in well-dressed ladies than well-dressed dishes, they chose to assume that the *salons* of the *Frères Provençaux*, the *Rocher*, *Véry*, and *Bouvilliers*, were the resort of the best society; and thus created a custom which they fancied to be that of the country.

“Lady Dawlish wants us to dine with her to-morrow, at the *Rocher de Cancale*,” said Matilda one morning to her husband. “Colonel Villiers will call in an hour for our answer.”

“I detest those vulgar *cabaret* dinners,” cried Norman. “One has to play audience all the time to Villiers’s and Amboise’s criticisms on the new *entrées*,—their wit being a stale *réchauffée* from the *Almanach des Gourmands*. Pray make some excuse.”

“I find that, in compliment to *us*, Lady Dawlish declined including Lady Catherine and Mr. Norman in her party.”

“What then?—Villiers prefers *your* company to that of the impertinent Patagonian.

Lady Dawlish, however, had better stick to the Normans. They belong to her own school of egotism and self-conceit. For the love of mercy, dear Matilda, let me not see *you* enrolled among the exclusives !”

“ Do not alarm yourself. Their art is not so easily acquired. Lady Dawlish’s listlessness, which appears so natural, is a *chef d’œuvre*. When other women affect that sort of well-bred inanity, they do it in a fussy, vulgar manner, that betrays itself to be art. Nothing is more difficult than to pass the day in doing and saying nothings, which from the manner in which they are said and done appear to be some things.”

“ Waste not *your* genius in the attempt ; and at all events oblige me, my dearest Matilda, by giving up the *Rocher* dinner party.”

The next sacrifice requested of her was to relinquish Lady Dawlish’s Thursday soirées ; where, though nothing was provided for the amusement of the guests, the surface of the society was so smooth and brilliant that people quitted the house fancying they had been

amused. After renouncing the pleasant *réunions* of Lady Dawlish, it was easy to resign the whispering parties of Madame de Montrond. Than these political sub-parliaments, nothing could be more “forcibly feeble,” more emphatically dull;—but it was considered *de bonne compagnie* to go and whisper away an evening, once a week, in the Countess’s apartments at the château; where the *beau monde* glided in mysteriously, and mouthed its nothings by whispering in couples on the divans round the room, as if intercommunicating the most important and confidential intelligence.

Even the livelier *Thés dansants* of Lady Arthur, were soon tacitly interdicted; for Matilda, who had emerged into the brilliancies of the world solely in accordance with the caprice of her husband, was easily persuaded to retire anew to the domestic seclusion in which he appeared to discover new sources of enjoyment and affection.

By degrees, Sir Richard’s purpose was accomplished. She withdrew from general society; she wearied out the assiduous solicitations

of Colonel Villiers, and even avoided all public amusements, unless when enabled to enjoy, at the theatre, tête-à-tête with her husband, the piquant sallies of Mars or the elaborate classicality of Talma. At the opera, at Feydeau, at the Théâtre Français, the Normans sometimes appeared together. But they were no longer seen apart.

CHAPTER X.

Be well advis'd,—tell o'er thy tale again !
It cannot be—thou dost but say 'tis so.
I trust I may not trust thee ; for thy breath
Is but the vain breath of a mortal man.
Thou shalt be punish'd for thus frightening me.
Then speak again !

SHAKSPEARE.

CANDID as was the disposition of Matilda, her intercourse with her family had long been tinged with reserve, by desire to withhold from the resentment of her father and the exulting comments of Tom Cruttenden, the secret of her domestic disquietudes. Her letters, both to her sister and the Ravenscrofts, glanced as lightly as possible over her recent brilliant introduction to society, which could not be

detailed without involving the admission of her personal triumphs.

“ Ay, ay, poor soul ! ” —cried Cruttenden, when Elizabeth read aloud to the fireside circle the joyous letters in which her sister now described her cheerful home, or quiet excursions with Sir Richard. “ I knew that account we read in the ‘ Herald ’ of her opening the Duke of Berri’s ball, would turn out mere newspaper fudge. —Sir Bluebeard mews her up in Paris, you see, just as he did at his old rat-hole of a country seat ! — ”

“ What motive could the London papers have for inventing their statement that Lady Norman has been one of the most brilliant ornaments of the court of the Tuileries throughout the winter ? ” —remonstrated Elizabeth.

“ *Motive*, indeed ! —As if the penny-a-liners wanted a *motive* for their fabrications ! —As if your sister would seem so proud of spending her evenings at the playhouses along with her curmudgeon of a husband, if she’d the privilege of flaunting away in tiffany and beads at their

make-believe French court?—However, there's one comfort!—the English ninnies won't be able to flaunt there long.—The French can't abide King Log now they've got him; and take my word for it, they'll soon have their peppery little artillery captain back among 'em again;—and *then*, my service to British tourists!—The devil or Nap will take the hindmost."

"Matilda's letters do not allude to any such apprehension."

"Matilda's letters allude to just such flimsy, cobweb, polite-conversation nonsenses, as young ladies love to write about. But the price of stocks alludes to it, Miss Betsy; and I take the price of stocks to speak more to the purpose than half the clap-trap speechifiers in parliament. And you may tell Matty from *me*, in your next epistle, that if she don't look sharp and persuade Sir Richard to make the best of his way home afore the rain falls in earnest, they'll be wet to the skin afore they can get up their umbrella. Tell her I've private informa-

tion that Nap will be out of quod afore his year's up !—”

Elizabeth Maule was too prudent to give more than a hint to her sister of this admonition. But it sufficed to startle Matilda; and she was not backward in confiding her alarms to her husband.

“Mr. Cruttenden must be an admirable judge of the state of Parisian politics !”—replied he, with an incredulous smile. “For my part, I have no anxiety. I was at Guerchant’s yesterday. The circle was crowded with the most ardent partisans of Napoleon, but not a word of politics ! Literature, science, and the drama, exclusively occupied their attention. — *Could* they have been talking so enthusiastically of arts and academies, had their party been on the eve of a great movement !”

Without pretending to the tact of a Madam de Montrond, Matilda thought otherwise; but she did not presume to oppose her opinion to that of her husband.

“At all events,” resumed Sir Richard, “since a doubt has been raised on the subject,

it will be better to give up our journey to Italy."

"To *Italy*?"—exclaimed Matilda, who entertained as much idea of such an expedition as of a journey to Tobolsk. "Did you intend to go to Italy this spring?"

"What better can we do with ourselves? We are both heartily tired of Paris; and, on quitting Selwood, I made arrangements for a year's absence."

Matilda was silent. She waited to be told of what else she was tired, and where else she intended to go.

"Nothing can be more insupportable than Paris during Lent," said he, "particularly to a moderate Catholic like myself, who am tied down against my conviction to certain observances. Our best plan would be to engage one of the fine seats near Paris, which are to be let at this season. We should pass a pleasant summer, and be on the spot to observe every variation of the political atmosphere:—temporary seclusion being, of course, indispensable to our project."

“Our *project*?” reiterated Matilda.

“Our project of an adoption,” replied Sir Richard, in a lower voice.

“You think, perhaps,” said Matilda, “that the little creature would familiarize itself with us more readily, if excluded from the sight of other people?—”

“Infants familiarize themselves readily enough with any one,” said Norman, carelessly.

“I have been considering,” said Lady Norman, “that perhaps we should be prudent in selecting a child of more advanced age: the health and intellect of an infant are so little to be relied on!—Whereas, at an age more developed, one forms some surmise of future character.”

Sir Richard turned upon her with an inquiring look; but the sweet serenity of Matilda’s face reassured him that she intended no sarcasm. “Of course,” she pursued, unabashed, “our chief hope of comfort in the child must depend on its disposition.”

“Our *sole* hope depends upon its inheritance of my property,” answered Norman, firmly.

“Your *property*?” interrupted the astonished Matilda.

“An object to be secured only by the selection of a young infant, and your temporary seclusion from society,” continued he. “The world, and those cursed Normans, will otherwise never believe the child to be our own.”

“But you surely do not *intend* them to believe it?”—demanded Matilda, turning very pale.

“For what other purpose do you suppose me desirous of adopting a child, which may live to be the plague of our lives? I want to become the comptroller of my own fortunes, my dear Matilda. I want to feel myself master of my own house—the house of my forefathers. Providence has denied us children. Let me, at least, secure myself an heir!—”

“I fear I did not exactly understand your views, when I pledged myself the other night to ——”

“Do you mean,” interrupted Sir Richard, turning sharply upon her, “that you wish to *retract* your promise?—that, after misleading

me by an assurance of acquiescence, you intend to frustrate my plans?—”

“I confess it appears to me scarcely justifiable to supersede by such means the rights of ——”

“*Rights!*” exclaimed Norman, again interrupting her. “The law of collateral entail is one of the vilest abuses we derive from feudal times,—an abuse which it will be the business of modern enlightenment to reform. In securing my property to an individual of my own selection, I only anticipate by a few years a freedom which the amended laws of the realm will ultimately confer upon every Englishman!”

“Still, to impose a stranger on the world as a son of our own——”

“Matilda!” cried Sir Richard,—“these scruples should have occurred to you before. Deceived by your apparent concurrence, for the last ten days I have enjoyed uninterrupted happiness. The blessed hopes of former years have been restored to me,—the sweet affection, the calm content!—My wishes seemed to be all in all to you, as in our time of early infatuation.

If by your vacillation you defeat my plans, I have only to submit,—for your concurrence is essential to their accomplishment ; but, in withholding it, you destroy the last illusion of my life,—the belief that my welfare is dear to you as your own !—”

He spoke with so much emotion, that Matilda dared not reply. She knew that he was in the wrong. She knew that the act he meditated was every way reprehensible. She remembered her father’s denunciation that “a falsehood is as a viper, flung back, sooner or later, into the bosom of him who utters it !”—And she trembled, for she saw herself on the verge of crime !—

“I have, in fact, already so far committed myself,” continued Norman, slightly embarrassed in his turn, “as to announce to several of our friends our expectation of a family, in order to prepare the way for reappearing in the world, a few years hence, accompanied by our adopted child.”

A thousand contending feelings agitated the heart of his wife at this explanation. He had

announced that she was likely to be a mother ! Never till that moment had she felt humiliated by the mockery of her own position as a childless wife ; for the mere sound of that groundless announcement stirred her soul with emotion. He had announced, that she was likely to be *a mother* !—It now occurred to her that, within the last week, several of their intimate associates had regarded her with an air of deeper interest, and been more careful and attentive to her movements. But she also recollected the affectionate deference with which she had been treated by her husband ; and instead of hailing it as a testimony of rekindling love, was compelled to admit that his attentions to her in public were a scene of dissembling, intended to mislead the opinion of the world. He was deceiving others, as well as inducing her to deceive them.—But, alas ! it was already too late to throw off the mask. She had not courage to defy the world's dread laugh, by admitting that they had plotted an imposture, and lacked energy to carry it into execution.

While thus ruminating on the painful per-

plexities of her position, the tears rolled silently down her cheeks; and compassionating her distress, Sir Richard, with more sympathy than she had expected from him, affectionately took her hand.

“Do not afflict yourself thus, my dear Matilda!” said he. “Since you feel irreconcilably averse to the thing, my wishes shall be sacrificed without a murmur. I fancied we understood each other. I fancied we were acting in concert; but since it is not so, do not hesitate to withdraw your concurrence. I own that your concession would have imparted to our middle age that seal of domestic felicity, of which offspring are said to be the sole security. By taking the part of a mother towards my adopted heir, I should have fancied you so in earnest, and cherished a proportionate fervour of love and gratitude. But let not this inducement mislead you from what you consider to be your duty. The spotlessness of your conscience, my dearest wife, has a claim superior to the wishes and prayers of your husband; and whatever may be your decision, I will neither reproach

you for the false hopes you permitted me to form, nor love you the less for this second and most bitter disappointment."

The unusual tenderness of his tone and manner drew fresh tears down the cheeks of Matilda. She wanted the moral courage to fulfil what she knew to be her duty. She wanted firmness of mind to control the gentle impulses of her affectionate heart. The delight of imparting happiness to her husband proved irresistible !

"I have no right to oppose obstacles to your plans," she faltered.—"*Your* judgment ought to decide me, *your* will to be my law.—Whatever course you choose to take in this matter, shall have my utmost support."

"My dearest Matilda!" exclaimed Norman, pressing her hand with rapture, "this compliance renders me the happiest of men. If you could imagine how those detestable Normans have latterly embittered my existence,—if you could guess what gloomy thoughts have been passing through my mind !—But all my vexations are ended by your amiable self-sacrifice. I am convinced that the true happiness of our life is now

beginning. We shall see every thing in a different light the moment we invest our prospects in the destinies of a little being who will grow up under our eyes, fashioned by our opinions, and attached by our tenderness."

Though cheered by the elation of her husband, Matilda did not inwardly share his enthusiasm. She could imagine these ecstasies arising for a child of their own, but not for an alien.

"My plan is," resumed Sir Richard (resolved not to let the courage of Matilda cool a second time), "to select an infant at the hospital of the *Enfants trouvés*, and make it mine by legal adoption. Five or six, sometimes a dozen, wretched babes are daily received there; so that at any moment the choice will be easy. You have, however, been so much seen and admired here, my dearest wife, that several months ought to elapse before your pretended accouchement takes place. This period we must pass in retirement, no matter where. In May, we can return to Paris, and accomplish our scheme."

“ But all this cannot be done without taking others into our confidence,” said Matilda ; her heart sinking at the prospect of the load of hypocrisy she was about to assume.

“ Certainly not. But such things are by no means uncommon. Money will secure me the co-operation of a nurse and physician, who need know nothing of our real name and rank in life.”

“ But our own servants?—”

“ With the exception of your personal attendant, it will be easy to deceive them. Mrs. Vaux you must contrive to dismiss, and send home.”

“ That will be very difficult.—Vaux is such a faithful attached creature ! She has been with me ever since my marriage,” pleaded Lady Norman.

“ An excellent plea to propose her retirement on a pension. She has some marriage engagement, if I remember ?”

“ To your head keeper at Selwood.”

“ Tell her then that, as we are about to travel, you will require the services of a foreigner.

I will pay her expenses home, and secure her an annuity of twenty pounds a-year."

"Poor Vaux !" sighed Lady Norman.

"My dear Matilda, she would not under any circumstances have remained with you long; and, depend on it, the poor woman will be enchanted with her change of prospects."

But even the certainty of becoming Mrs. Ghrimes ten years sooner than she had expected to be rescued from the odium of spinsterhood, did not reconcile poor Vaux to so sudden a parting from the kind mistress to whom she was attached. Lady Norman's sweetness of character was eminently displayed in considerations for her servants and dependants; and though the waiting-maid was too well acquainted with the arbitrary temper of Sir Richard to hazard opposition to a decree emanating from her master, she departed with secret indignation rankling in her heart, that she should have been superseded by a "vile, artful, designing, intriguing, Italian," in whose service to my lady, Mrs. Vaux predicted to all at Selwood, that no good was intended.

Matilda's task of deceit was now beginning in earnest. Sir Richard required her to make to her family and friends the announcement which he undertook to circulate among her Parisian acquaintances; and though Matilda found it easy to loiter at home in an invalid cap and loose morning-wrapper, with Norman for her constant companion, and an endless supply of new books, music, and works for her recreation, she recoiled from the office of deliberately inditing a falsehood to the Ravenscrofts and her father.

Nevertheless, it must be done. Sir Richard assured her that the step was indispensable; and at the close of one of her lively letters to Sophy, she accordingly added, "I look forward with delight to my return next autumn to dear Selwood; and do not be surprised if I bring you a little stranger, to claim a share of the fondness which you have often told me you feel for the infant species, before they grow old enough to be troublesome."

By this equivocation, Matilda hoped to satisfy her conscience; yet when the implied untruth

was written, she closed her letter with a burning blush, without hazarding a reperusal; “look on’t again, she dare not!—”

Towards her father, the task of dissimulation was still more difficult. By Mr. Maule’s desire, she corresponded with him from time to time; but her sister Elizabeth was the person charged with answering Lady Norman’s letters. Now Elizabeth was almost as straightforward and downright as her father. With the delicacy and warmth of feeling becoming her age and sex, she united a degree of high moral principle, which her seclusion from the ways of the world had maintained without spot or blemish. To her honest-hearted, plain-worded family, therefore, Matilda felt that even the whitest of lies was far more difficult to insinuate, than it would have been to bestow the blackest upon a Lady Dawlish or a Lady Arthur D——.

The hint which was to convey the intelligence of her prospects of a family, was however at length written and despatched; and Matilda’s spirit sank rebuked when the answer arrived,

not in the handwriting of Miss Maule, but of her exulting father. The old man's elation knew no bounds. The prospect of being grandfather to a young baronet of large estate, was a vision of glory he had long relinquished; and his delight appeared to his daughter almost puerile. She no longer thought it childish, however, when she reached the close of the epistle, and perused the solemn prayer and benediction bestowed upon herself and her expected child. He told her that he and his would intercede with Heaven in her behalf in her hour of peril; and Matilda's lips grew white with terror at the idea of the imposition she was presuming to practise in the sight of Heaven, upon the father who so honoured its commandments, and whom its commandments enjoined her to honour.

She was recalled to herself by a postscript in Tom Cruttenden's handwriting. After divers jocular comments on her laziness in wasting twelve years on a performance which reasonable women complete within one, he informed her that if she chose to return to England, and have the little stranger born as became the son

of English parents, on English ground, he would endow it, if a boy, with a godfather's token of ten thousand pounds. But alas! though Matilda *knew* that it would be a boy, she felt pleased that the necessity for perpetrating her fraud in France, would secure her from imposing upon the generosity of the eccentric friend of her childhood.

CHAPTER XI.

It is one thing to know the rate and dignity of things ; and another to know the little nicks and springs of action.—
SENECA.

TOWARDS the close of February, the Normans took possession of the fine old Château of St. Sylvain, a short distance from the archiepiscopal palace of Conflans, on the banks of the Seine, and within ready reach of Paris.

“ Frank Villiers and his set will ride down to see us here,” said Sir Richard, “ and Lady Dawlish and Lady Arthur visit you, and report you on their return to be on the sick list. A lounging-chair and wrapping-dress will suffice.”

“ Would that it were all over,” replied

Matilda with a sigh. "The caresses of a dear little creature brought up to love me as its mother, may reconcile me to this duplicity ; but the preliminaries are indeed odious."

Apprehensive that her patience might fail in the tediousness of the trial, Sir Richard now rarely quitted her side. Every day brought down from Paris some costly trinket or interesting work for her amusement ; while the bitter envy of Lady Catherine was excited by the exhibition at Minette's of a splendid *layette*, and at Lesage's of a *barcelonnette* of the richest materials, for the use of the expected heir of Selwood Manor.

One morning, about a week after their instalment, Sir Richard, having ridden into Paris to execute some trifling commission for his wife, a *calèche* containing Lady Arthur and Lady Dawlish drove into the courtyard ; and Lady Norman's hospitalities were claimed for the day.

"We know you must be *ennuyée à périr* here," cried Lady Arthur, "and intend to spend the morning and dine with you." And though a bright March sun was glittering

upon gay parterres, bright with hyacinths, tulips, and anemones, the two fine ladies would not be enticed out, but drew towards the fire to enjoy a long day's chat with the pretended invalid.

"How on earth do you get rid of yourself in this impossible place?"—cried the affected Lady Arthur, looking round with an air of compassion.

"*On laisse passer le temps !*" replied Matilda, with a languid smile.

"*Triste ressource !*" observed Lady Dawlish, shrugging her shoulders ; "but of course you intend to return to Paris for your confinement ?—"

"I—I—hardly know——"

"Not know ?—and next month so near ?—Quite a heroine, I protest !" said Lady Dawlish, with a sneering smile. "I suppose your Bonapartean *clique* have persuaded you to have Evrat, Dubois, or some other wretch belonging to the household of Josephine or Marie Louise ?—"

"I really cannot say. I leave all such matters to the choice of Sir Richard."

“Of *Sir Richard*?” ejaculated Lady Dawlish,—“and with all your pattern propriety and delicacy of feeling?—Surely you had better consult Madame de Montrond as to whom would be appointed for such an office, were *Madame* to delight us with an heir to the throne?—”

“I cannot fancy those who are so recently returned from emigration, better skilled than ourselves to pronounce upon the professional eminence of Paris,” replied Matilda, as calmly as she could.

“People in a certain station of life are informed of everything,” persisted Lady Dawlish. “Nothing, for instance, escapes the knowledge of the château.”

“Nevertheless,” remonstrated Lady Arthur, “I was the first to mention last night to Madame de Montrond the report generally prevalent of Napoleon’s escape from Elba. He promised, you know, to be back in Paris with the violets.”

“The violets are here already,” said Matilda, pointing to a vase of fresh-gathered Parma violets on the *guéridon* standing near her sofa.

“And the *petit Caporal*, they say, not far distant,” added Lady Arthur.

“Absurd!” retorted Lady Dawlish. “As if the people permitted to enjoy once more the decencies of legitimate monarchy, would ever for a moment tolerate again the tyranny of an upstart!”

“Madame de Montrond did not seem to think it by any means absurd.”

“Why, what did she say on the subject?—”

“Nothing! or she would have taken her course of lessons from Talleyrand to very little purpose. But she dismissed her whisperers an hour earlier than usual, and scudded off along the galleries towards the back stairs.”

“To alarm the king?—”

“As if anything short of the probability of a national famine could rouse up *ce cher gros papa de roi!* When Napoleon is within an hour’s march of Paris, the king will perhaps think of packing up the royal *casseroles* and *comestibles, comme Pierrot, qui a toujours peur et toujours faim!*”

“How can you condescend to retail the *mauvaises plaisanteries* of the newspapers!”

said Lady Dawlish, yawning. "Napoleon is as likely to be within a day's march of Paris, as you and I a day's journey of Pekin!—"

"*Nous verrons !*" replied Lady Arthur, with similar *sang froid*, while Matilda trembled as she listened. The return of Napoleon must necessitate the flight of the English from Paris ; and in her own country, how painful, how impossible, to persevere in the imposture to which she had been pledged by her husband ! To *her* ears, the reports so vaguely cited by Lady Arthur D. were of terrible import ; and as the day wore away, the necessity of entertaining her two languid guests while her thoughts were thus grievously pre-engrossed, wore down her spirits. Never had she so eagerly longed for the return of Sir Richard ; and when the dusk drew on, she dreaded lest lights should be brought and reveal to her companions the changes of her countenance.

The sounding of the hall bell at length announced the return of her husband ; and starting from her sofa, regardless of the presence of her visitors, she rushed to the door to receive

him and gather from his lips the tidings so momentous to her happiness. But lo! the hand she seized, in addressing the tall figure she imagined to be that of Norman, responded to her grasp by a cordial hearty shake; while an unfamiliar voice saluted her with—"Here's a surprise, Matty!—Who'd have thought of us two meeting among the parleyvoos! But I warrant I'm grown out of your recollection?—"

The candles at that moment borne in before Sir Richard Norman, which revealed to *him* the inopportune presence of Matilda's fashionable visitors, displayed to Matilda the gaunt figure of an uncouth young man, whom she had little difficulty in recognising as her brother, Crutenden Maule; and while her husband hastened to offer a hollow welcome to her two friends, Lady Norman was grieved to feel that her own reception of her brother was scarcely more sincere. Her conscience reproved her that she regarded in the light of a serious evil this interview with one of her nearest kindred. But Master Crutt., the spoiled child

of the whimsical old torment of her youth, was too self-satisfied a person to take heed of her embarrassment.

“ I fancy I *have* given you a surprise, eh ! Matty ? ”—cried he, taking a place on the sofa by her side. “ Sir Richard tells me you never got Betsy’s letter announcing my visit. Well, a pleasure’s all the greater for popping on one unawares !—I took up my quarters last night at your place in Paris, not knowing you was moved ; and, by good luck, Sir Richard looked in to-day, and gave me a lift down here in his cab.”

“ It was very kind of you to come so great a distance to see me,” said Matilda faintly, perceiving that the eye-glass of Lady Dawlish was fixed wonderingly on her brother.

“ To see *you* ?—Come, that’s a good ’un !—As if my father would have spared me from business for ten days, if there hadn’t been two birds to be killed with one stone. Not so soft as that, I take it !—Father keeps as strict a hand on us as ever.”

“ I never found him otherwise than indulgent,” said Matilda, in a low voice.

“ In *your* time, may be; but folks grow grumphy as they get in years. Old Crutt.’s always putting it into father’s head that I’m wilder than other young fellows of my age,—that’s Tom’s way of shewing kindness, you know.—The greater the favourite, the greater his pains to plague one out of one’s life.”

“ And was it Mr. Cruttenden, then, who suggested your journey to Paris?” inquired Matilda, dreading lest a pause in Sir Richard’s conversation with Lady Arthur should expose to their criticism the coarseness of her brother’s tone and manner.

“ Why, for once, father and he were of a mind!—You see the firm happened to have the luck of a great order from a wholesal’ house in Paris, so they thought I’d better come and have a peep at the securities before the goods were made up.—Brother John, you know, sports fine, and won’t have nothing to say to the business,—John’s going to take orders. (Old Crutt. says *his* orders will never bring him in the value of *ours*!) Father’s just bought him a fine living in Yorkshire.”

“ And William ? ”

“ Bill’s got *his* head turned t’other way !— Bill’s all for soldiering ; and he’s persuaded father to lodge money at Greenwood’s for the purchase of a cornetcy for him. *I’m* the only one of the family that sticks to the main chance. I never had the least spice of the book-worm in me, like John ; or the least taste for sporting copper-lace outside my jacket, like Master Bill. Business is *my* mark ; it comes as natural to *me* as Burton ale after Cheshire !—Tom Crutt. wanted to send me to college with John, when we left Rugby ; but I thanked him for nothing, and said I’d as lief go to the treadmill. So I’m to be taken into partnership next year, and when father and old Cruttenden drop, may be I shall buy out Wickset, and have the whole thing to myself. There’ll be a go, eh ! Matty ?—‘ Cruttenden Maule ’ will look a plaguy deal more knowing, painted on the wagons, and copper-plated at the head of a folio, than Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset, and Co. !—No ‘ Co. ’ for me ! I’ll be my own master, or nothing ;—a man or a mouse.”

“ Do you think of remaining long in Paris ? ”

“ Can’t justly say till Sir Richard has stepped up with me to the Marry, as they call it, where these parleyvooing rascals have their compting-house. There’s few of ’em, I find, can speak plain English, like reasonable beings; and I don’t pretend to understand their outlandish lingo. However, when Sir Richard’s brought us to a deal, if I find the parties good men as they pretend, the sooner I’m out of their filthy city of holes and corners, the better. Old Crutt. said at parting he’d warrant *I* wasn’t the chap to waste my time and money among lantern-jawed pickpockets of Frenchmen; and I mean to prove his words.”

Matilda’s satisfaction at the assurance was damped by finding that her fastidious friends had been attentive auditors to this ill-timed *exposé* of her family affairs. Nor could she refrain from grieving that, instead of being able to present to them her mild, intelligent, well-mannered, elder brother, she was compelled to see their wonderment excited by the ill-bred familiarity of the adopted darling of Tom Crutenden. The contrast between his unformed,

ungainly person, and the flashy style of dress sported by the provincial buck, produced a ludicrous effect; and when, on being offered by the *maître d'hôtel*, at dinner, an *entrée*, one of the *chef d'œuvres* of Sir Richard's eminent *chef de cuisine*, he exclaimed in an audible voice, "Oh! hang your messes!—Give me a cut of mutton and a potatoe, and I wont trouble your hashes and kickshaws!"—Lady Arthur could no longer repress her laughter.

"I trust, Mr. Maule," said she, maliciously singling him out for conversation, "that although you profess not to understand the language of the country, you met with no difficulties on the road?—"

"None in the least, my lady," replied Crutt. with a knowing smirk. "Folks must get up early in the morning who manage to take *me* in; and I was put up to snuff before I set out. I kept my valeese, as they call it, in my hand, every place we stopped at, and managed to arrive without losing a rag. If it wasn't for the plague of the custom-house (where the shameful smuggling of the English quality makes 'em deuced

sharp), I should have had no hindrance to complain of."

"Were there any letters for me in Paris?" inquired Matilda of her husband, having already obtained from him a vague assurance that no political news was stirring confirmative of Lady Arthur's intelligence. "Any visits—any cards?"

"Guerchant has been several times there, and having taken down our address, intends, I suppose, to pay us a visit."

"Guerchant! — one of the *canaille* of Bonaparte?" — said Lady Dawlish, drawing up.

"Admiral Guerchant,—a peer of France and a most distinguished man," observed Sir Richard, gravely.

"*A peer!*—you might as well talk of the peerage of a Scotch lord of Session!" persisted her Ladyship, with undisguised contempt.

"Why, you don't mean, Matty, that you meddle or make with folks that ever belonged to the natural enemy of your country,—the worst wretch that ever was sent on earth for the punishment of mankind?"—vociferated Crut-

tenden Maule, speaking rather thick, after his third glass of champagne.

“ Sir Richard, you know, is liberal in his politics,” observed Matilda, watching him with anxiety.

“ Oh, he’s *liberal*, is he ?” said her brother with a boisterous laugh. “ Old Crutt. swears there an’t a greater joke in nature, than the liberalism of the English quality !—‘ A liberal lord’s much the same as a warm frost !’ says Tom. ‘ Great cry and little wool among ’em, as the barber said when shearing Solomon’s pigs !—There’s our Sir Richard,’ says Tom, ‘ fancies himself a liberal, ’cause by sticking to the whigs he hopes to carry the *Cartholic* question ; but in every thing else,’ says Tom, ‘ Sir Richard’s as stiff a tory as Queen Elizabeth ! Why it stands to reason, that people in *his* situation of life *must* be for the maintenance of all outstanding abuses,—pension-lists, and place-givings ; ’cause, sooner or later, he may be the better for ’em. And as to expecting a baronet with a fine rent-roll to help and pull down hereditary rights, ’tisn’t a thing in nature !—Sir Richard’s as

clear a case of conservative,' says Tom, 'as ever I clapt an eye on.' "

" Bravo, Mr. Maule, bravo !" cried Lady Arthur, greatly entertained by his eloquence. " Thanks for your announcement of so valuable an addition to our party !"

" *Your* party ?"—retorted the young orator, more bemused than ever, and indignant at the presumption of a giggling woman with a painted face pretending to political entity. " I suppose your ladyship's party means a tea-party, —or a card-party, eh? We've smoked out the she-politicians in *our* town !—Bless you, they went and held a meeting one night at the King's Arms, to petition parliament, neither they nor any one else understood for what ; so we gave 'em a touch of the marrow-bones and cleavers to bring 'em to their senses."

Cruttenden Maule had the pleasure of enjoying to himself the laugh with which he closed his harangue. No applause followed this coarse attack.

" I cannot help fearing," said Matilda, red with shame and vexation, " that Admiral

Guerchant's frequent visits to our Hotel corroborate the report of Napoleon's disembarkation in France."

"Napoleon's *disembarkation*!—Nap come back again to be Emperor!"—cried Cruttenden, aghast at the idea of collision with the man-monster, the *loup-garou*, whom he had been brought up to consider as a being of supernatural power and wickedness. "And to choose the minute of my being over here in Paris!—Here's a pretty kettle of fish!—But I suppose you're only humming me!"

"Be not uneasy, Sir," replied Lady Dawlish, with much solemnity; "Birnam wood may come to Dunsinane, but take my word, Napoleon Bonaparte will never make his appearance again at the Tuileries."

"The Tuileries think otherwise," said Lady Arthur. "So much so, that Madame de Montrond's panic last night determined Arthur to secure our passports."

"It would really be extremely provoking, so early in the season!" observed Lady Dawlish, peevishly, after a moment's consideration of her

own plans. "What could one possibly do with oneself in London, till after Easter? and it would not be worth while to go down into Yorkshire for a fortnight. It would be a great inconvenience to me should the news prove true."

"Far worse to *us*," said Lady Arthur, "for we are no longer in parliament, so that it is indispensable for Arthur to remain abroad."

"You are all in great haste to anticipate evil," interposed Sir Richard. "Even were Napoleon re-established at the head of affairs, what can be more unlikely than that he would repeat his long-repented blunder of the detention of English tourists?—It is his object to conciliate the nation."

"Old Crutt always said there was colloquing going on betwixt the French and the Papists," whispered young Maule, half audibly, to his sister, after swallowing another glass of champagne; "and you see he wasn't very wide of the mark."

"In that case," said Matilda, replying with great self-command to her husband's previous

remark, "the best thing we can do is to remain here. I have not the slightest fear. I have no doubt the report will prove a stock-jobbing fabrication."

Before she could conclude the sentence the door was thrown open, and Colonel Villiers made his appearance.

"Villiers!—and on opera night? this is really kind of you," said Sir Richard, heartily wishing him at the antipodes. "A glass of Mouton after your drive?"

But Villiers was too deeply engaged in inquiring after the health of Lady Norman, and marvelling whom the uncouth savage by her side could be, to reply to the invitation.

"Do you bring us any news?" inquired Matilda.

"Nothing since five o'clock. The telegraph is, of course, dumb at this hour.—"

"The telegraph!" cried Cruttenden Maule, gazing with open eyes on the slender young gentleman so much at ease with himself and the world.

“ Napoleon is at Lyons, and the Tuileries off for Gand,” added Colonel Villiers, with perfect sang-froid, nodding to Norman over his wine.

“ *Authentic?*”—demanded his mother.

“ Beyond dispute. Old Tal. left Paris for Belgium five hours ago.”

“ Then all is lost !” replied Lady Dawlish, with her usual listlessness. “ Relapse is worse than disease. These wretched French will never a second time submit to the restoration of the Bourbons.”

“ Restoration of the *Bourbons!*”—ejaculated Cruttenden Maule. “ Who the devil cares for the Bourbons !—What’s to become of *us?*”

“ I beg you will be under no apprehension, Lady Dawlish,” said Villiers, addressing his mother ; “ I have sent off a courier to secure horses for you to Brussels, and apartments at the Belle Vue.”

“ But why not secure horses towards England at once ?”

“ Most of our set are going to Brussels. As

well to have the air of accompanying the royal family, eh?"—replied the Colonel.

"Shall we be in any danger then, Sir, by staying in Paris?" demanded Maule.

Villiers looked amazed to find himself addressed by the anonymous savage; but answered not a word.

"I asked whether you thought we should get into any scrape by remaining a day or two in Paris?"—again demanded young Crutt.

"We have secured horses to Brussels," replied Villiers.

"So I heard you say. But me, and Matty, and the rest of us——?"

"The rest of you?"—retorted the Colonel, clearly of opinion that the world could produce no duplicate of so monstrous a vulgarian.

"I mean all the English in Paris?"

"Cannot presume to give an opinion, Sir.—The Hôtel Belle Vue would scarcely contain them, nor anything else, I imagine, short of the capacities of Noah's Ark—eh?" added he, turning, with a fastidious smile, to Lady Arthur D.

“After all, then, it may turn out vastly pleasant,” observed Lady Dawlish, addressing her exclusive friend and confederate. “We shall muster strong at Brussels; and a month or two hence, one might try Spa.”

“Have you seen Arthur,—and what are his plans?” inquired Lady Arthur of the Colonel.

“We all start at daylight. *He* makes our arrangements in Paris, while *I* undertake to fetch your ladyship and my mother home. Not an hour to be lost if we mean to countenance the king.”

“What a pity that we can’t all start together!” cried Maule. “It’s madness to talk of staying here, and tempting Nap!—There’s no saying how he may take things, in revenge for his twelve months spent in quod!—Matty, I won’t hear of your remaining here!—Be reasonable, and set off to-morrow morning with my lady and the rest of your friends.—”

“Do not concern yourself, Sir, on Lady Norman’s account,” said Sir Richard, sternly. “*I* am the person responsible for her safety. But as you appear uneasy, and your negotiations in

Paris are at an end, I strongly advise you to lose no time in hastening home."

"Thank you for nothing!—you won't have twice to tell me *that!*" cried Crutt. "Catch me in Paris this time to-morrow, and I'll say something to you!—Why, if *I* was to be made prisoner of war, our business at home would go all to smash; it's as much as they can go to keep matters straight without me when I spin over to Cheltenham for a week's lark. May be, these ladies and gentlemen would give me a cast back to Paris to-night?"

"*My* carriage is at your service," replied Norman, resolved not to afford so rich a treat at his expense to Frank Villiers and Lady Arthur as would be afforded by the company of his brother-in-law. And when, at the close of an anxious half hour to Matilda, her fair friends took leave of her with a cool "*à revoir!*"—as if they were engaged to meet again the following night at the opera, rather than to part to encounter the terror of civil war,—Sir Richard accompanied them to Colonel Villiers's *dormeuse*, and instead of returning immediately to the

drawing-room, gave circumstantial orders to his confidential English servant to accompany Mr. Maule back to Paris, and accelerate as far as possible his preparations for departure from the country.

“Your arrival here still seems like a dream,” observed Matilda, when at length she found herself tête-à-tête with her brother.

“And a deuced ugly dream it’s beginning to be!” cried Crutt, taking possession of the fireplace, and rubbing his legs.

“Surely you will remain till to-morrow morning?” resumed his sister, kindly.

“If you’ll engage to set off back with me to England?”

“Impossible! We have innumerable arrangements to make, previous to taking such a step. But I want to ask you a thousand questions about my father,—about my sisters and brothers,—about *home*.—Surely you might remain till to-morrow morning?—”

“And be snapt up before I know what I am about, till the next peace!—No, no!—I tell you, Matty, ’twould be the ruin of the business

and the family, if anything was to happen to *me*. I was loth enough to come, only father and Tom Cruttenden *would* make me. The truth is," he continued, lowering his voice, and looking suspiciously towards the door, "they've got it into their foolish heads that you're not so happy as you pretend to be, in foreign parts, and that you are not at liberty to say so. So, knowing me to be pretty sharp, old Tom proposed my making a pretence of the deal we'd got the offer of, to start for Paris, and see how the land was lying; and father bid me say that if you'd the least mind to come back, and money was the obstacle, to make no bones of drawing upon Maule, Cruttenden, Wickset and Co. for whatever was wanting.—Money ought not to be a hindrance, Matty, to any whim you may take just now!"

"Believe me, pecuniary considerations have nothing to do with the case," said Lady Norman, colouring deeply.

"So much the worse,—so much the worse!"—cried young Maule,—the kindly warmth of his uncouth nature becoming apparent the moment

he began to anticipate evil for his sister ; “ for so long as there was hope that matters might be mended by the ready, no fear of things turning out cross, so long as Cruttenden Maule acts as cashier to the concern !—But mum ! for here comes Sir Richard !—Not a word to *him* !—only, whenever the wind wants raising, for your *own* wants or wishes, please to remember which way it sets.”

A hearty shake of the hand concluded this unpolished harangue ; and the tears which Matilda had with difficulty restrained throughout the evening, fell profusely at this demonstration of the untiring affection and liberality of her neglected family. Poor Maule, meanwhile, attributing her emotion to the grief of parting from him so abruptly, bad her cheer up, and not be down-hearted on his account ; that he would write from Paris,—Calais,—London,—Dover,—his home,—to satisfy her misgivings on his account.

At that moment, Sir Richard re-entered the room. The stifled sobs of his wife, and the earnestness with which her brother was attempt-

ing to console her, instantly excited suspicions in his mind, and threw an additional shade of loftiness into his adieus to the untutored lad, who had come so far, to a country he abhorred, and of whose very language he was ignorant, on an errand of service to the alienated daughter of his father's house !—

CHAPTER XII.

Valiant? Foolish curs, that run winking into the mouth of a Russian bear!—You may as well say that's a valiant flea that dare eat his breakfast on the lip of a lion!

SHAKSPEARE.

THOUGH aware that her husband's eyes were fixed upon her in surprise and displeasure, Lady Norman gave free course to her tears when the carriage containing her brother rolled from the gates of the château. The quickly following events of that harassing day had overpowered her. The visit of her inquisitive friends, the arrival of her brother, and, above all, the great incident, bringing with it so vast a train of evils and perplexities, filled her with emotion. Could it really be the intention of Sir Richard to ex-

pose her, for the furtherance of his guilty projects, to dangers which were driving from Paris the rest of his countrymen?—

Perplexed by misgivings touching the motives of such singular obstinacy, she sat concealing with her hands her tearful eyes and throbbing brow. Unmindful that he was pacing the room with hurried footsteps, she took no note of his presence, till she found one of her hands suddenly snatched with an agitated grasp, and saw that Sir Richard was kneeling beside her chair.

“Matilda!” said he, in a faltering voice, —“these tears, these murmurs, are a reproach greater than I can bear!—Notwithstanding your exemplary resignation to my wishes, I discern all your terrors, all your griefs;—and my remorse is indeed bitter!—I have involved you in a maze of difficulty and deceit.—I have plunged you into anxieties, how little to have been apprehended at such a moment, your own judgment must assure you.—And it is too late to recede!—Believe it, on the attestation of the anguish that now distracts my mind, dearest, it

is too late to recede. The suspicions of the Normans are awakened. Already they are keeping watch upon our movements, which, only by remaining here, I shall be able to defeat. The importunate intrusion of those two detestable women this morning, was a mere visit of observation, suggested by Lady Catherine Norman. Often repeated (as it would be were you to fall at Brussels into their coterie), the frankness of your ingenuous nature would break through all disguise. Answer me candidly,—were you not, during their presence here, repeatedly on the point of betraying yourself?”—

“I own it,” replied Lady Norman, with a profound sigh; “for deceit weighs heavy upon my soul. I was reared in the fear of God and the paths of truth. I cannot, without remorse of conscience, take this guilt upon my head.”

“Once more, then, I throw myself upon your mercy!” cried Norman, excited almost to frenzy. “Once more, and for the last time, I appeal to your affection for a concession such as never woman yet had power to vouchsafe unto a hus-

band. Tell me honestly and decisively that you have not courage to confront the annoyances which may await us here, and even now, at the eleventh hour, I will renounce my projects—submit to my mortification—defy the laughter of the world, and griefs more poignant than you can guess!—But if you have fortitude and self-command to sacrifice, for my sake, a woman's trivial fears, I swear to you that you will attach me to your feet by more than any common tie of human tenderness;—you will render your wayward, capricious husband, humble as becomes the obligation you confer, and grateful as he ought ever to have been for your unchanging gentleness and love!—”

Sir Richard was convulsed with tears as he uttered this earnest expostulation; and unused to such vivid demonstrations of feeling, Matilda listened with a degree of emotion almost equal to his own. But soon, her perturbation subsided as a deeper sorrow took possession of her soul.

“Deal fairly with me!”—said she, involuntarily withdrawing her hand. “Admit that

there are circumstances connected with your present plans, either beyond your power to divulge, or beyond your inclination?"

"*I do!*"—replied Norman, meeting with firm but not unfeeling steadiness the inquiring glances of his wife. "Were *my* wishes and hopes alone concerned, God knows that I would sacrifice them to appease your slightest anxiety—far more, your present reasonable and well-grounded uneasiness. But there is much which I am solemnly pledged to bear and to conceal, in bearing and concealing which, I have not the shadow of right to require your co-operation. There have been moments, indeed, when I have fancied it better to give myself up to ruin, and fling away my life and honour, rather than bind you to the fulfilment of a promise extorted in a moment of too confiding love. But the welfare and peace of mind of others are staked upon the issue; and for *their* sakes, I feel it a duty to appeal once more to the affection you have sometimes professed to bear me. Yet, should this influence be insufficient to weigh with you in my favour, I submit without a murmur!—

Neither now nor evermore, shall a word of reproach or irritation betray the extent of my disappointment."

"You have justly calculated on the weakness of my nature," said Matilda,—voluntarily restoring the hand she had mechanically withdrawn.

"Say rather on its *generosity*!"—interrupted Norman, in a depressed voice, pressing it to his lips. "You are kinder to me than I deserve."

"I make no demands upon your confidence," resumed Matilda, vexed by a demonstration of tenderness which she regarded as hypocritical. "There are mysteries upon which, perhaps, even a wife has no right to encroach; but, while admitting the insufficiency of our privileges, I claim at least justice at your hands. If I renounce for your sake the susceptibility (or,—let me do myself justice,—the *sensibility*) of my sex, lay aside in your turn the reserve with which you deteriorate the happiness I should otherwise find in rendering you service.—Do not exact from me the sacrifices of a friend, and treat me with the mistrust due to an

enemy.—Do not again expose me to the sneers which my incertitude with respect to our plans, drew this morning from Lady Arthur and Lady Dawlish. Let me know definitively what I am to do,—say,—suffer,—and it shall be suffered, done, and said. In one word, are we, under every possible contingency, to remain *here*?—”

“ We are.”

“ ’Tis well!—Such then shall be my answer should the Guerchants visit St. Sylvain, as you anticipate. And next, what *motive* am I to assign for my resolution?—”

“ Your own choice,” replied Sir Richard, in a less assured voice —“ your disinclination to hazard a removal at such a moment.”

“ And when do you intend the event to take place which is to set us at liberty?”—demanded Matilda,—an involuntary accent of scorn mingling in her usually gentle voice.

“ About the middle of April. I have made every arrangement to that effect. Madame Gervais (the woman I have engaged to attend you according to the custom of most French ladies of your rank in life) has been placed in

confidence, and secured by a considerable bribe. At the period specified, she will arrive here late one evening, with an infant selected for the purpose at the hospital of the *Maternité*, or *Enfants trouvés*, where my man of business undertakes the legal act of adoption without compromising my name. The following morning, it will be announced to the family that you are a mother ; and the infant furtively introduced into the house by Madame Gervais, will thenceforward pass for your own."

"Thanks!"—replied Lady Norman, unconscious of the air of bitterness infused into her tones and glances. "I have now learnt my lesson, and am content.—It is some years since I placed my happiness in your keeping, and resigned my will to your disposal. May this second and gratuitous act of submission bring forth the good fruits you promise!"

"Forgive me," cried Norman, "if, instead of grateful acknowledgments ever unworthy the extent of my obligations, I further ask of you an avowal which may be painful to your feelings: was this extraordinary visit of your brother

prompted solely by its ostensible motive?—Do I not rightly guess that your family entertain some suspicion of the truth?—”

“ You wrong them,” replied Matilda, calmly. “ Rude and uncivilized, you may have a right to consider them ; but there is not one among the inmates of my father’s house capable of imagining so vile a proceeding as that in which we are engaged.”

Sir Richard’s usual irritability suffused his cheek for a moment. But he was in no position to hazard provocation. He felt, at that moment, with grievous consciousness, the superiority over himself with which he had been forced to invest his wife.

“ But to deal with you as candidly as I have required you to deal with myself,” resumed Lady Norman, “ my brother’s journey to France *had* other motives than the one avowed.—My family, more tender of my happiness than I deserve, fear that I am detained here against my will ; —that my heart, on the eve of the event I have falsely announced to them, may be yearning

after home,—friends, — comforts, — affection ; —and accordingly despatched my brother to offer me the means of returning to the security of Selwood Manor, in case that motives of economy detained us abroad. You must forgive my father,” continued Lady Norman, in a faltering voice. “ My father is an inexperienced, uneducated man.—He has been led to believe that France is a place of peril to his daughter.—He does not reconcile himself to the idea of her encountering the hazards of childbirth among strangers and enemies.—You must forgive my poor old father !—”

Subdued by the peculiar tone assumed by Matilda, Sir Richard contented himself with replying—“ But after I had so positively assured him that pecuniary interests had no share in my proceedings !”—

“ His anxiety on his child’s account induced him, I suppose, to fancy that you were deceiving him,” replied Matilda ; and Norman dared not, as he would have done at any other moment, burst forth into a defence of his own

honour and integrity,—the words being scarcely silent upon his lips which conveyed a lesson of deliberate duplicity to his wife.

The following morning, before the breakfast things were removed, Admiral Guerchant was with them in all the elation of perfect triumph and happiness. Matilda could scarcely recognise her cheerful but composed old friend of the Place Royale in the sparkling, excited, rejuvenised man who came to tender the performance of his recent engagements to the stranger in the land.

“How I longed to give you a little hint of what was in the wind, the morning you called upon us!—Do you *remember* that last morning you called upon us?”—said he, addressing Lady Norman. And a pang of reminiscence almost induced her to exclaim, “Alas! how can I forget!—It was the first dawn of the agonizing suspicions which have since encompassed my dwelling with a hedge of thorns!—”

“All was even then *en train*,” resumed the Admiral; “and both Madame Guerchant and myself burned to assure you that the offer of

our services was no idle vaunt. You are determined, however, to rise superior to the vulgar terrors of your countrymen, and put your trust in the emperor's justice?—You will not fly from Paris, like all these moths and butterflies of the Wellington coterie?—”

“ We have no intention of leaving France,” said Sir Richard, in a constrained manner.

“ We intend to remain quietly here at the Château de St. Sylvain,” added Matilda.

“ The *château*?—*Pardieu*, I don't know that I recommend *that*!”—cried the Admiral. “ Come back into Paris, if you will.—Your term in the Rue de Provence is not yet expired?—”

“ The hotel belongs to the Duc de Vergnies,” said Norman, “ who, resuming his functions at court, will of course require the use of his residence in town.”

“ You conceive, then, that the emperor's field-m Marshals and *grand officiers de la couronne* will come down, *mainbasse*, upon everything they can lay their hands on?”—demanded the Admiral, with a hearty laugh. “ No, no,—law is law, the code, the code,—whether an N or an L be

entwined among the vignettes of the golden cornice at the Tuileries!—If you have a lease of Vergnies's house, it will stand good, even were *he* prime-minister, and yourself the second in command to *Vilainton*, or secretary to *Castelri*!"

"I have already received this morning, and answered in the affirmative, a polite request from the Duc de Vergnies that, as we are not occupying his house, I would cede it to him for the remainder of the term. I could not without ungraciousness refuse his request."

"Let *that* be no obstacle," cried the good Admiral. "I am about to remove to the Hôtel de la Marine. The Emperor honours my faithful services with a ministerial portfolio, and in the interim, my humble home in the Marais is thoroughly at your service; unless, indeed, Lady Norman will still further favour us, and, by becoming our inmate at the Admiralty, procure to my good wife the satisfaction of presiding over the birth of your expected son and heir? 'Tis a ceremony, you know, in which my half-dozen married sons and daughters afford her annual experience."

“Thanks, thanks—a thousand thanks!”—cried Matilda, compassionating the embarrassment of her husband. “But I have made up my mind to remain here. My preparations are completed. I love the quiet of this place; and, above all, should fear the confusion of a ministerial residence. You do not reflect, my dear good Admiral, that were any popular tumult to occur, *your* house would be one of the first to be attacked?—”

“We don’t intend to have any popular tumults;—and my house, private or ministerial, has not a chance of being attacked!”—cried Guérchant. “The Parisians are for once unanimous in their welcome to the Emperor. The whole city is in a tumult of joy; and under every possible vicissitude its good will has attended me. The *badauds* have a personal liking for the old man, who has advanced their glory with his blood without opposing their interests in the senate.”

“Still, you will admit that the versatility of their character renders them uncertain allies,” pleaded Matilda, with a smile.

“ I admit everything asserted by a fair lady,” said the old man, gaily ; “ but she must believe in my assurance, on the other hand, that, though perfectly secure in Paris, (where, should she choose it, I will obtain her a piquet of gendarmerie as her body-guard,) she may not be so well off here.—The peasantry are little to be depended upon.—They entertain a deep-seated abhorrence of the English.—Already, they have evinced an intemperate spirit against the allies of the Bourbons, whenever an opportunity has presented itself. If by chance, since your sojourn here at St. Sylvain, that Madame de Montrond of yours has paraded her way down to you in one of the royal carriages, the villagers have already marked you as royalists, and will insult, if not otherwise molest you !—”

“ I am not afraid,”—said Matilda, with a fainter smile. “ Believe me, I am not afraid.—”

“ Like the Emperor, you trust too largely to your star,” replied the Admiral.

“ She trusts to the influence of her own good deeds,” interrupted Norman. “ Since her arrival here, Matilda has done twice as much for

the village, as the proprietors of St. Sylvain during the last ten years. The people are disposed to worship rather than insult their benefactress."

"You don't know the French peasantry!"—cried the Admiral. "Their prejudices are *ferocious*.—They possess a peculiar faculty for *hating*.—Were your Duke of Vilainton, or your Castelri, to spend fortunes in converting their hovels into palaces or in mending their roads with golden ore, it would not prevent them from mixing poison in his cup, should he ask a draught of water in return!—"

"You are doing your utmost to alarm me, I see," said Matilda, with an unchanging countenance, "but I am not to be frightened from my purpose. Be it courage—be it obstinacy,—I am resolved to remain at St. Sylvain. Remember," said she, turning towards her husband with a significant glance, "remember, I charge you, do not let Admiral Guerchant dissuade you from acceding to my wishes."

Norman thanked her with an eloquent look.

"I wish I had more time to devote to the

task of persuasion," cried the Admiral, rising to depart. "But my horses' heads are turned towards Auxerre, where I am to meet the Emperor, and assist in escorting him into Paris; and never bridegroom so longed to look upon the face of bride, as I (God bless him!) upon Napoleon's! 'Tis twelve months since I parted from him at Fontainebleau.—Even now, I seem to feel the grasp of hand with which he bade me a silent adieu.—He would not hear of my accompanying him to Elba.—He knew the force of family ties upon my heart, and was too generous to hazard the safety of the old tree by rooting it up.—But I knew that we should have him here again;—I knew that the wishes of a whole people would not be in vain;—I knew that the sceptre of an indolent selfish voluptuary was not for the energies of France!—I was as sure of feeling that grasp upon my old hand again, as I was of life; or never could I have supported the weight of the last eleven months of humiliation!—And before night, I *shall* shake hands with him!"—cried the Admiral, tears glistening in his enthusiastic eyes at the thought,—

“with *him*, who was the making of me and mine—
with *him*, who knew how to *create* loyal servants
and glorious actions, for he knew how to reward
them !—*Sacristie* ! how I want to hear his voice
again,—even if inflicting one of those reprimands
which he could render so terrible !—But I am
running on, and neglecting my duty elsewhere,
without compassing any advantage here,” he
continued, rising and kissing Matilda’s hand as
a signal for departure.—“I shall be a proud
man, fair lady, when I see you again ; but I
trust it will be under my own roof, where I
leave it to Madame Guerchant to determine you
to take up your abode.”

CHAPTER XIII.

Sick minds are like sick men that burn with fevers,
Who, when they drink, please but a present taste,
And after, bear a more impatient fit.—BEN JONSON.

THOUGH aware that it was impossible to accept the generously offered hospitality of the Guerchants, it was a comfort to Matilda to feel that she had still such friends stationary in Paris. Her brother had notified to her his departure. The English had fled the city, many in real alarm and consternation, others making it a political virtue to demonstrate their attachment to the Tory banner floating over the heads of the fugitive Bourbons,—an emblem, at that period, of victory and victory's fruits.

The Whig baronet had a plausible pretext for not following the flying footsteps of the satellites of Toryism; and Matilda had the comfort of finding the Admiral's prognostications fallacious as regarded the peasantry of St. Sylvain. Flattered by the confidence reposed in them, and the determination of the opulent English family to remain in France when such legions of their country-people were flying in all directions, they seemed desirous to make proof of their respect towards the inhabitants of the château, as towards hostages deposited in their hands. A week had not elapsed after the triumphant re-entrance of Napoleon, before Lady Norman felt perfectly at ease. Her chief regret arose from the anxieties which she knew would be experienced in her behalf by her friends at home and in Worcester-shire.

But though at ease on her own account, she was not altogether satisfied, when, instead of giving her credit for self-command, Sir Richard chose to make the position of public affairs a theme for exultation, proclaiming his satisfac-

tion in *any* change of circumstances which secured them from the intrusions of “Lady Dawlish’s set” and the espionage of the Normans. She could not refrain from secretly taxing him with indifference towards her feelings and comfort and the welfare of his native country.

So long subdued in spirit, passive and indulgent, Lady Norman scarcely recognised herself *now*, when, pacing up and down her vast apartments in solitary perturbation, she reflected on all that had been exacted of her, and all the exactions still to come. Conscious of being a puppet in the hands of her husband, she felt that not even the ennobling motive of affection, which rendered her so docile in his hands, could excuse the blindness of her devotion. He had promised that the happiness of her future life should repay her subservience. But her subservience was guilt,—falsehood,—hypocrisy,—meanness,—guile,—and *these*, what could repay?—Was she not doubly degraded by his admission that there existed a secret in which she must not participate?—That

he had other motives for choosing to remain in France than the mere desire to impose upon the world by the adoption of a supposititious child ?

It was impossible for the mind of woman, even if endowed with a far stronger frame of philosophy than that of Lady Norman, to abstain from pondering upon these mysteries whenever she found herself alone. Her self-command scarcely availed to desist from questioning Sir Richard when they were together. To renounce the dear delight of dwelling upon the past, and reviewing again and again his conduct and declarations, was beyond her power. His own word had now confirmed the vague insinuations hazarded by Madame de Montrond. He had avowed the existence of *liaisons* in which she did not participate. What needed there more to bring the life-blood throbbing to her agitated heart—the rising moisture to her troubled brow—when she reflected how far she might have been betrayed by him to whom her life was so generously devoted !—Serene as was her natural character, there was something in all this to stir every stagnant pulse, and agitate

almost to distraction the feelings that were not to be confided to any living soul—to any guardian spirit of peace!—

Nevertheless, amid all her anguish, there abided consolation. Matilda's perceptions had been stimulated by the last year of observation, till every change of Norman's countenance became a source of revelation; and they had not long been inhabitants of St. Sylvain before she felt convinced that, whatever might be the nature of the mysteries involving her husband, his affection for herself was gradually returning. It was neither pity nor policy which prompted the glances she occasionally detected in his countenance, and the thousand nameless kindnesses which arise only from the fulness of affection. Policy might determine him to the companionship with which he chose to lighten the dull and cheerless hours of her probation; or compassion towards the wife he was wronging, instigate him to lighten the burthen of her cares. But there are looks and movements, the instinctive impulses of tenderness, not to be mistaken by a woman's heart; and these were

often manifest to Matilda in the demeanour of her husband. She surprised him gazing upon her with self-reproachful admiration. When referring in conversation to the conduct of other women, whether traditional or as regarded the examples of daily life, she observed that his commendations were reserved for the mild domestic beings of character analogous to her own; and that he praised her by inference in praising the virtues which she practised. He grew impatient if the slightest of her commands were neglected by the household; and seemed to live for the promotion of her comfort. And all this was done without forfeiture of the air of graceful superiority peculiar to Sir Richard Norman, and peculiarly attractive in the eyes of his timid wife;—it was done as if he felt aware that his services were unworthy her acceptance.

One day, when she saw him disposed to pass the morning sauntering with her among the fine avenues of chesnut-trees sloping from the château to the Seine, and dignified with the name of park, she could not forbear reproach-

ing him with his want of curiosity in not having visited Paris since the re-inauguration of the Emperor ; for though Admiral Guerchant had counselled him to avoid, in the first instance, exhibiting himself as an Englishman in any public place, the interdict was now withdrawn ;—the *Ministre de la Marine* having not only mentioned to the Emperor the motive of Sir Richard and Lady Norman's sojourn in France, but placed them under the especial protection of the police.

“ I have, as you accuse me, very little interest in the subject,” he replied. “ Napoleon is in *my* eyes neither the demi-god worshipped by his partisans, nor the monster vituperated by the English press. *I* look upon him in the light he is defined by the Abbé de Pradt, as a *Jupiter Scapin* !”

“ Still, Jupiter Scapins have not often fallen in our way. The Scapins one usually sees, are intriguing valets,” said Matilda, playfully. “ A Scapin holding a thunderbolt, is a curious variety of the species.”

“ But to me not an interesting one.”

“ If you will not take a peep at him to gratify

your own curiosity, at least satisfy *mine*," pleaded Matilda.

"No!" replied Norman, decisively; "I have made up my mind not to visit Paris."

"Say at once that you have *pledged* yourself not to go," said Lady Norman, incautiously.

"I should think, Matilda, you might have discovered by this time that I am no great maker of promises," he resumed, more gravely, "even to *you* who have a right to require them of me;—and what other human being has a claim upon my word?—"

"In short, for obstinacy sake, you are determined not to go?" rejoined Lady Norman, feeling that she was proceeding too far, "and I must resign myself not to torment you further on the subject."

But to adhere to this promise was easier than to refrain from *tormenting herself*,—for the mystery was constantly uppermost in her mind. Though Sir Richard had admitted himself bound by some mysterious tie to remain in France, he held communion with no living soul beyond the precincts of the château. He re-

ceived no letters,—he paid no visits,—he maintained no further intercourse with the capital. Of what nature, then, were the bonds that hung upon him thus loosely?—Neither love nor friendship admits of utter neglect. Neither friend nor mistress would support with patience such total forgetfulness. Yet what *but* love or friendship has power to excite emotions such as Matilda had seen convulse the very soul of her husband?—His detestation of the Normans could not surely suffice to determine him to all this risk; or to distract his mind with the anguish to which she had seen him a prey?—

A sudden thought occurred to her, (and with what transport did she welcome the conjecture!) that his engagements might be of a political nature. Recalling rapidly to mind the ardour with which, for two years previous to his visit to the continent, he had involved himself in the intrigues of the catholic cause,—his laborious correspondence,—his princely liberality,—and, connecting his own sojourn at Paris with the sudden departure of the Abbé for Italy, she became convinced that Madame de Montrond's

suggestions were correct ; that in spite of pretended indifference, he *did* deeply interest himself in political intrigues, not as regarded the state of France, but the Church of Rome !—

Her soul brightened in a moment. True to her own faith and modes of worship, she had never seen cause for reproach in the devotedness of her husband to his suffering church ; and *now*, with a degree of fervour that Tom Cruttenden would have trembled to behold, she rejoiced in the idea of his being a secret emissary of the Jesuits !—She saw all in the clearest light.—Sir Richard had doubtless pledged himself to the Abbé to be on the spot as his intermediary agent with England, in too sacred a manner to admit of succumbing even to the unexpected force of public events. The only letters that reached him at St. Sylvain were in the Abbé's handwriting ; and after perusing them, the mind of the baronet was invariably disturbed and pre-occupied for the remainder of the day. It was doubtless some religious scruple which prevented him from taking a Protestant into his confidence ; a scruple which

she had no desire to overcome ; regretting only that a mystery so valueless in her eyes as a political or ecclesiastical intrigue, should have induced her to distress herself, and wrong her beloved Norman with even momentary mistrust.

This fact once established in her mind, the spirits of Matilda rose in a manner wholly inexplicable to her husband. Much as she longed to seek his pardon for her previous injustice, she dared not injure herself in his eyes by avowing the preposterous suspicions she had, even for an instant, entertained. She contented herself therefore with redoubling her submissiveness, her kindness, and cheering his pre-occupation of mind by incessant smiles and devotion. She now so far surmounted her repugnance to the project in which she had promised connivance, as to allude frequently to her anticipations of delight in the acquisition of the little stranger who was to be unto them as a son. She spoke of it as though she felt that it was almost to be a child of her own ; nay, even appealed to *his* tenderness in its favour, as though pleading for her own offspring.

“Remember,” said she, as they were sauntering together in the park of St. Sylvain, one fine April afternoon, watching the progress of the chesnut buds as they glistened and expanded in the sunshine till the pale green leaves peeped out between the glossy scales,—
“Remember, I must have no impatience, no ill-humour, with my boy!—I put up sometimes with your pettishness on my own account, because I know that I am troublesome, and that you have had much to try your patience in my inexperience of society and ignorance of the world. But *we* are responsible for the faults of the little creature we shall have dragged out of its natural sphere; and I insist upon your being as kind and forbearing towards it as the tenderest father in the world.”

“You do not surely consider me such a monster as to ill-use it?”—demanded Sir Richard, abruptly.

“God forbid!”—replied Matilda, in an earnest tone. “But there is a wide difference between ill-usage and the kindness I shall exact for my child. Without exactly rendering myself as

ridiculous as Lady Catherine, I shall, I fear, become a very doting mamma ;—and I wish to prepare you for my weakness.”

Involuntarily Sir Richard pressed to his side the arm that was locked within his own !—Something of the spirit of old times was arising between them. Matilda’s nature was so frank, that just as impossible as it had been to mistake her previous pique and bitterness, was it now to misconstrue the joyousness which took possession of her breast from the moment of deciding that the mysterious figure in the dark chariot was a Bishop, or perhaps a Cardinal, residing incognito in Paris as the accredited agent of the Propaganda !—

In this happy frame of mind did she await the arrival of Madame Gervais and the promised babe. Relying upon the prudence of Sir Richard for the disposal of every arrangement, she made it her sole request, that Ghita, the Italian waiting-maid whom she found to be in his confidence, might never be permitted to confer with her on the subject. There was something of latent scorn occasionally visible in

the woman's countenance, which, in spite of the obsequiousness of her deportment, rendered her service peculiarly unwelcome to Matilda, after the warm-hearted alacrity of Vaux; and she felt that she should have no patience with the woman if emboldened by the office of a confederate. From the first it had been her custom to wait upon herself, in preference to summoning Ghita to her aid; and so strict was the silence still maintained towards her by the woman concerning the approaching event, that it was clear she was obeying the instructions of Sir Richard.

Meanwhile, the middle of April arrived, and expecting that the nurse and child would soon make their appearance also, Lady Norman confined herself chiefly to her apartment. She amused herself with examining the splendid preparations for the little stranger; the lace, the cambric, the cups of *vermeil*, the rosewood rockers, the fringed curtains of cachemire and India muslin;—and though a sigh often escaped her that this cost and care were for an alien, and that she was guilty of a heavy fault in con-

niving at an imposition, there was enough of the frailty of human tenderness in her heart to sink all other considerations in the triumph of being freed from her jealous cares, and the hope of being once more united, heart and soul, in uninterrupted affection with her husband.

On the 18th of the month, however, no tidings having reached them from Madame Gervais, Sir Richard, apprehensive perhaps of some misunderstanding on the part of his emissary, entered Lady Norman's room at an early hour, and with some perturbation of manner announced that he should proceed that day to Paris to ascertain the exact intentions of his confederate. The project was warmly applauded by Lady Norman. But at that moment, the countenance of Ghita, who was arranging the glossy tresses of her lady's hair, happened to be revealed to Matilda's observation in the glass before which she was sitting; and it was impossible to mistake the smile of contempt with which, as she conversed with her husband, she saw herself contemplated by the Italian.

Startled and indignant, Lady Norman was

on the point of reprehending her insolence; when, alas ! the sense of her own perplexing position reduced her to silence; and she covered her embarrassment by renewing her advice to Sir Richard to lose no time in repairing to Paris. Again, though she still spoke in English, a language which Ghita affected not to understand, the same insolent glance of disdain sparkled in the eyes of the *soubrette*.

So affected was Matilda at the moment by this disagreeable incident, that she had not leisure to take note of the agitation of her husband. Even when he was gone, she sat alone in her chamber musing upon the annoyance of being compelled to accept the services of a person who regarded her with undisguised contempt.

The day wore slowly away.—The weather was genial as summer; but in anticipation of the events the evening might bring forth, Lady Norman felt almost guilty of an indiscretion when, in spite of Sir Richard's absence, she ventured on her usual stroll in the park; and accompanied by her Selwood favourite, her faithful Rover, proceeded so far as the fine alley of lime-trees,

now almost covered with their spring verdure, which shaded an extensive terrace of turf overhanging the Seine.

The air was fragrant with a thousand violets. Spring breezes swept invigoratingly from the river. It was a moment for happy thoughts, could Matilda have given free course to her innocent gaiety of heart in company with her friends the Ravenscrofts, or her own cheerful, chatty sister Elizabeth. But her spirit recoiled upon itself when she reflected upon her isolation as the compulsory inhabitant of a foreign country; surrounded by strange servants,—attended by an insolent Italian,—and on the brink of an action which, if exposed, must sink her in the estimation of every friend;—which, though secured from detection, lessened her immeasurably in her own. But for the ever-ready sophistry of love whispering consolation in the plea of a benefit conferred upon her husband, Matilda would, at that moment of excitement, have given herself up to misery and despair!—

Overpowered by her reflections, she threw herself down to rest upon a moss-grown stone-

seat commanding the river ; and, at some distance along its windings, the ruins of the once sumptuous palace of Choisy-le-roi, a century ago the high altar-stone of the temple of voluptuousness. Glancing towards the shattered fragments of its white arcades, Matilda involuntarily bethought her of the lovely Duchesse de Chateauroux,—her struggles, her fall, her penitence, her early death ;—and a strain of remorseful meditations arose in her mind upon the insufficiency of even love itself to embalm and sanctify a cause abhorrent to the dictates of virtue and morality.

“ The time may come,” thought she, fixing her eyes upon the sparkling current of the river, “ when he for whose sake I am sacrificing my consciousness of duty, will revile me for the weakness of having ceded to his wishes. Should the imposture be detected, or should the poor child turn out unsatisfactorily, it is upon *me* Norman will turn with the reproach that I *ought* to have opposed his guilty scheme.”

Her contemplations were at that moment suddenly interrupted by the fall of a stone flung

with some violence from the river, and evidently impelled towards her with a view of attracting attention, not of inflicting injury. The spaniel crouching at her feet instantly darted forward with a growl, and began rolling over and over the missile, as if an object of some peculiar interest. It was in vain she called to Rover to desist. The intelligent animal would not relinquish his efforts till Lady Norman, stooping down to fling the stone back again into the river, perceived that a paper was attached to it, bearing her own superscription.

With an instinctive movement of surprise and terror she glanced hastily round, to ascertain from what quarter, or by whom, the stone could have been thrown. But not a creature was within sight; the trees were still too imperfectly clothed with verdure to admit of any person being concealed among the branches. Not so much as a boat or barge was perceptible on the stream. Nothing was to be seen but one of the long trains or rafts of wood, floating from Burgundy towards Paris, to be broken up for firing,

and the peasants who were steering its course from the opposite shore, out of reach of the territory of St. Sylvain.

It occurred to her, however, that the bank of the river below the terrace was in many places hollowed by the action of the current; so that any person having attained the spot from the river, might remain concealed among the ledges of shrubby ground below. From such an ambush, it would be as easy to clamber up towards the spot where she was standing, as to launch the fragment of stone; and Matilda expected every moment to see emerge from the overhanging bank some strange and menacing figure. Yet she had not courage to fly. She stood rooted to the place, holding the slip of paper she had detached; on which was inscribed in English, in a strange handwriting,—“Beware!—Submit not to be the dupe of a dupe.”

From the paper, Lady Norman glanced towards the bank,—from the bank to the paper,—incapable for some moments of thought or action. The dog still went sniffing along the

shore ; and at length Matilda took courage to follow in the same direction, and peer down with anxious eyes among the matted weeds and brambles. She determined to accost, if possible, the person from whom she had received so singular a warning, and insist upon further explanation. But the effort with which she formed this resolution was thrown away.—No human being appeared. The dog, a sure indicator, abandoned his pursuit ; and after sundry snortings and sniffings, disposed itself to follow Lady Norman. There was not even a trace among the bushes of recent passage ;—no boat moored below,—no indication of any kind to guide her conjectures ; and more distressed than ever, she hastened homewards, and took refuge in her own apartment.

For the first time her heart sickened at the sight of the beautiful cradle established in her dressing-room. When equipping herself for her walk, she had glanced towards these preparatives with a smile of delight at the idea of the enlivenment and solace her isolated existence was about to attain in her expected

little companion. But she longed no more for the stir and bustle of the nursery. The word "dupe" filled her with dismay, refrigerating even her womanly kindness towards the child.

All her perplexities were returning. Ghita's air of impertinence that morning, her husband's embarrassment, and now, this mysterious admonition, seemed linked in tormenting significance. Had Norman been in the house, she would have resigned herself to the impulse of her feelings, and insisted upon a definite reply to every question she felt inclined to address him. But he was absent. She had only her own heart, her own memory, to interrogate; and the one upbraided her weakness, while the other eluded her demands.

How wearily that morning—that day—that evening—dragged along!—Sir Richard did not return; and, obliged to confine herself to her room to escape the observations of the household, she attempted to beguile the tediousness of the time by the perusal of a new work. Every moment, however, she kept

starting up, and going to the door to listen ; or to a small window in her ante-chamber, overlooking the court yard, in the hope of her husband's arrival. Still, at each succeeding attempt, she was disappointed. Sir Richard did not make his appearance ; and again and again, she was obliged to have recourse to her book to get rid of the thronging thoughts that caused her pulses to beat and her burning cheeks to tingle. If, as her anonymous monitor asserted, she was *a dupe*, she was the dupe of Norman,—of her husband !—And what treachery could equal *his*, in practising upon one whom excess of affection chained in bondage at his feet ;—one who renounced her very reason and judgment to become his instrument ;—one who lived but in him and in his happiness !—

Poor Matilda could scarcely believe in such cruelty. She determined to suspend all judgment on the subject till she had thrown herself into Sir Richard's arms, and, clinging to his bosom, demanded the truth,—the whole truth,—from his lips.

The book which accident had thrown in her

way to beguile the hours of that eventful morning, was “*Adolphe*,”—a story flat, because incomprehensible, to those whose feet have trodden only the monotonous paths of common life; but to the impassioned, the unhappy, the forsaken, the breviary of a religion of love and sorrow.—It was the very book to stimulate her to a more curious examination of her griefs and causes for grief.

As the time wore on, however, Matilda’s suspicions gave way to acute anxiety. The usual dinner hour was long past, and no Sir Richard!—Her meal having been served in her own apartment, she at length sent down to desire that Monsieur might be no longer expected. But the dismissal of the servants’ preparations did not render her mind more easy. Sir Richard’s habits of life were punctuality itself. Unless at the period of his prolonged absence in France, Lady Norman had never seen him otherwise than exact to his appointments; and he had volunteered the promise of being back to dine at St. Sylvain.

That he might be detained by some dilemma

connected with the conveyance of the infant into the Château, was far from improbable; and impressed with this idea, Matilda would have subdued her disquietudes but for that mysterious warning. Might not Sir Richard's absence at that moment constitute the treachery to which she was a dupe?—Might he not be gone from her—perhaps not to return for a length of time—perhaps to return no more?—

A general shuddering seized her frame at the surmise of such an iniquity!—But no, it could not be!—She had no right to think thus hardly of him at the suggestion of some nameless enemy. It was far more probable that she was herself the dupe of a delusion wantonly created; that the scroll so incomprehensibly conveyed to her was “a thing devised by the enemy,” a deception practised on her credulity by the Normans. Sir Richard was, perhaps, detained from her by some personal misadventure—some blundering persecution of the Imperial police—some sweeping measure directed against British residents in France. She half determined to despatch a messenger to Ad-

miral Guerchant entreating him to institute inquiries. It was only on recalling to mind that, should her alarm prove premature, it would be most injurious to Sir Richard's plans to direct towards his abode at such a moment the vigilant eyes of the police, that Lady Norman was prudent enough to refrain.

There was nothing for it but patience!—Fixing her eyes upon the gorgeous pendule that graced her mantel-piece, (which had recorded the sad or joyous moments of the noble inhabitants of St. Sylvain from the days when Choisy was a royal palace, and Louis XV. a king,) she counted, minute by minute, the cheerless hours, till it became time to close the Château for the night. Though the vicinity of the house to a navigable river, as well as the constant transit of troops through the country, rendered it highly undesirable to leave its avenues undefended after midnight, Lady Norman insisted that the servants should keep watch till one o'clock, not suffering the huge mastiffs, the usual guardians of the domain, to be turned out.

At the appointed time, however, on hearing

the great bars and bolts of the hall doors drawn upon her, and remembering that Sir Richard was still away, and that she was pronounced to be "a dupe," she threw herself despairingly upon the sofa; to bewail the miserable destiny which had thrown her, helpless and friendless, into the mercy of a wayward tyrant, far from the home of her youth and the domestic sanctities of her native country.

CHAPTER XIV.

Here's a sight ! look thee ;—a bearing cloth
For a squire's child !—Take up, take up the babe !
SHAKSPEARE.

ALL was still as death in the Château.—Ghita, after her usual offers of assistance, had retired for the night ; and Lady Norman lay watching, in indescribable anguish of spirit, the fleckering of the *veilleuse* burning at the foot of her sofa. The figures reflected by the light through its vase of painted porcelain, seemed dancing fantastically on the opposite wall. The lofty alcove of the state bed looked dim and solemn, as it had never looked before. It was only by burying her face in the cushions of the sofa that she could shut out these unwelcome omens.

She dared not commit herself, according to her nightly habit, to the protection of Providence!—On the eve of so enormous a breach of integrity, so gratuitous an act of false witnessing, there would be crime in the attempt. She must bear up against the force of her terrors, and the sense of helplessness that besets the guilty. She almost longed to call back the woman she detested, to preserve her from the self-communing of solitude!—

At length, the beneficent Power to which she dared not appeal for protection, had pity on her sufferings. Wearied by the agitation of the day, she slept;—slept, and dreamt of home,—of old familiar faces, old familiar rambles with her brothers and sisters among old familiar fields, —where she was loud, and wild, and happy, without care or ambition to rise beyond the obscure condition of a manufacturer's daughter. The coarse, rude laugh of Cruttenden mingled in her dreams;—the approving laugh he had been wont in other days to bestow upon the gambols of his partner's children. But of a sudden it changed to a tone of mockery, a tone of con-

temptuous accusation ; and he was reviling her in words half jest, half scorn, for having defrauded an honest man's family in behalf of a foundling, when, waking with a sudden shiver, she found the grey light of morning stealing into the room, and her husband standing beside her.

“ Ha ! you are come at last ! ”—said she, starting from the sofa, and trying to compose her bewildered senses ;—when the surprise of finding him at that hour in her chamber, and a certain expression of wild delight irradiating his countenance, induced her to exclaim, “ But how did you make an entrance here ?—I fancied I had secured the door ?—”

“ You had ;—but I have a *passe-partout*.—I entered the Château without even the porter being aware of my arrival. How soundly you were sleeping, dearest Matilda, that you did not hear my approach !—”

“ Soundly, but not composedly,” answered Matilda, as she gradually recovered her self-possession. “ I have been dreaming painful dreams.—I lay down in misery.—Why did you

not return last night?—What detained you in Paris?—Why not prepare me for the disappointment?”—

“ I did not know that you would feel it a disappointment,” replied Norman, taking her hand between his, and gazing upon her with a still more rapturous expression of joy ; “ but if my absence made you uneasy, I am indeed to blame for playing truant.”

“ But what can have occupied you so long in Paris ?—”

“ In the first place, the brilliant preparations for the Champ de Mai ; which induced me to idle away my morning among other gaping loungers. Having met Guerchant, who was superintending the labours of the engineers in the Champ de Mars, he induced me to return home and dine with him.”

“ Then I am convinced you did not tell him you were expected back at St. Sylvain,” cried Lady Norman. “ The Admiral is a man of too much gallantry to do anything tending to keep me in such harassing suspense.”

“ I confess I thought that, with your books and garden, and the fine weather, you would scarcely have leisure to note my absence. In this persuasion, after settling with Madame Gervais that night would be the most propitious moment for her entrance here, I determined to prolong my stay by a few hours, and avoid a second journey.”

“ You saw Madame Gervais, then ?”—demanded Lady Norman, her heart sinking at once from the momentary elation produced by her husband’s presence, and resuming the careful looks produced by the event of the preceding day.

“ I did. Our preparations are complete. But you do not ask to see the child ?” added he, in a lower voice,—an anxious glance overshadowing for a moment the triumphant brightness of his face.

“ *The child !*”—faltered Matilda, turning deadly pale.—“ Is it then already here ?—”

“ It is in my room with the nurse. We had better lose no time in transporting the little

creature hither before the servants are up and about."

And expecting to find Matilda second his proposals with the ardour she had recently displayed in the cause, Sir Richard was amazed to find that no word escaped her lips, and that every tinge of colour vanished from her countenance. A confusion of thoughts and feelings overpowered her.—The word "dupe" was ringing in her troubled ears !—

" You seem surprised—you seem displeased !" said he,—astonished in his turn.—" Did you not expect this ?—I understood from you yesterday morning—that all was prepared ?—"

" Yes !"—faltered Matilda, neither daring to speak nor to remain silent.

" You remarked that no further time was to be lost,—that I could not do better than come to an understanding with Madame Gervais without further delay !—"

" Did I ?—Yes, I dare say I did !"—replied Matilda, breathing as though a heavy oppression hung upon her bosom.

“ Yet now, you seem reluctant,—vexed !—How is this, Matilda ? ”—cried he, growing alarmed in his turn. “ Do you mean to fail me in the hour of trial ?— ”

“ No, no ! ”—cried Lady Norman, scarcely knowing what she replied, and anxious only to gain time for the recovery of her self-possession. “ But make some allowance for the anguish of my heart at this eventful moment, in accepting from your hands a foundling,—an alien,—instead of having to present you with a child of my own !— ”

At this appeal, Sir Richard, encircling her affectionately with his arm, kissed the tears from her pale cheeks. At that moment perhaps she would have been reconciled to the event, and content to accede to his projects, but for the words still rankling in her heart—“ the *dupe* of a dupe ! ”

“ The Normans are avenged ! ”—thought Matilda, as she reclined her throbbing brow on her husband’s shoulder. “ The injury I am inflicting on them is amply repaid ! ”

After a moment's deference to her wounded feelings, Sir Richard seemed to remember that the business they had in hand was too important to be trifled with for the indulgence of unavailing sensibility.

"It is essential, dearest," whispered he, in the most soothing manner, "that the nurse and child should be established in your apartment before the household is astir. Ghita is in readiness to light a fire in the adjoining chamber. Will you give me leave to bring in Madame Gervais?"

And on Matilda's expressing assent he quitted the room, and by the duration of his absence, seemed inclined to give her time for perfect recovery. A woman would have judged more wisely, and allowed no leisure for reflection. The lapse of the next ten minutes re-excited the agitation of Lady Norman to so distracting a pitch, that, had the *garde* on entering the room been at leisure to take note of her pretended patient, she might have concluded that she was summoned to attend a lunatic. Pale and haggard, she could scarcely support herself when

Sir Richard, advancing towards her with the portly Madame Gervais, called her attention sportively to the infant, whose little face he uncovered for her inspection.

“How hideous!”—was Lady Norman’s involuntary ejaculation, as the ghastly light of early morning gleamed upon the new-born babe; an object beauteous to the eye of a mother, but distasteful enough to any indifferent spectator.

“*Hideous?*”—reiterated Sir Richard, his air of triumphant satisfaction giving place to a glance of indignation—“It is one of the finest infants I ever beheld!”

And the *garde*, comprehending from the tone of her employer that he was enlarging on the beauty of the child, burst forth into a clamour of eulogy, which did not prevent Lady Norman from retaining her opinion that she was looking upon a very ugly babe, attired in a very beautiful dress. Sir Richard did not think it worth while to controvert her decision. He addressed no further remark to her; but began questioning Madame Gervais as to the probability of its having taken cold, and the further

arrangements to be made for its comfort and accommodation. He could not have interested himself more warmly in the little creature's welfare, had it been a child of his own.

"Never fear, Monsieur—never fear ;—we shall do very well !"—was the woman's reply, in the cordial motherly tone peculiar to her vocation. "You have been up all night.—We don't want you here.—Leave me with *milédi*, who has her acquaintance to make with this little personage here. Ghita will get me all I want, *mon bon monsieur* ; and in half an hour we shall have the nurse from the *maternité*. Leave me with *milédi*."

To Lady Norman's surprise, he quitted the room without further inquiry or remonstrance ; evidently stung to the soul by her hasty sentence of disapproval of the babe. She now felt conscious that she had spoken hastily and harshly ; and when, a moment after Norman's departure, Madame Gervais placed the little creature unceremoniously in her arms, saying, "There,—hold it carefully for me a mo-

ment while I put things to rights a bit, in the other room,"—instead of resenting the freedom, she extended her arms kindly to receive the poor foundling.

It was perhaps a proof of tact on the part of the old lady, that, instead of giving time to the pretended mother to recoil with disgust from the child forced on her adoption, she appealed instantly to instincts latent in every female heart. No sooner did she find the helpless little being in her arms, than Matilda's heart softened towards it. In its sleep, it uttered a slight moan; and she raised its soft cheek to her own to soothe it with caresses. It folded its tiny hands upon its bosom as she bent over it, and the grace of its infantine movements excited her admiration. "Poor little creature!" was her silent reflection. "It is now motherless.—Its parents have cast it off for ever.—I should be unpardonable not to do my best towards supplying their place."

The nurse kept coming and going between the two rooms; bustling about and setting the

place to order, without offering to relieve her of her burthen. She contented herself with placing a cushion under Lady Norman's foot, loudly commending her skill as a nurse, and applauding the tranquillity of the babe, who had slept quietly from the moment of quitting Paris, without uttering a single cry to endanger discovery!—

“Not a soul knows yet of our arrival,” said Madame Gervais, making herself as familiarly at home in Matilda's room as if she had lived there all her days. “The servants will conclude by-and-by that Ghita has been attending on us through the night.—But we want no one. The fewer prying people admitted into these rooms at present, the better. For a week to come, *milédi* will content herself with my attendance and that of Monsieur. She will laugh at my awkwardness; but what then?—Poor old Gervais is accustomed to be laughed at!—Poor old Gervais is the best of lady's maids to a little gentleman six hours old; but she does not pretend to be a *femme de chambre pour une belle dame telle que milédi.*”

The good-humoured garrulity of the old dame seemed to place Matilda at her ease. After the cool silence of Ghita, the familiarity of Madame Gervais was a relief. She talked too incessantly to allow Lady Norman a moment for reflection ; and claimed her services for the child as frankly and cordially as if she really imagined her to be its mother.

The *nourrice* did not make her appearance so soon as was expected ; and Matilda found herself growing as uneasy as Madame Gervais. The little creature seemed pining for food. She fancied it might suffer seriously by the delay ; and kept hushing it off to sleep upon her bosom, while the *garde*, who had taken authoritative possession of the supposed sick chamber, dispatched Ghita to the lodge to make inquiries.

“ We will not render your penance longer than needful,” said Madame Gervais, watching with satisfaction the progress her little charge was making in the affections of its beautiful nurse. “ The *persiennes* closed for two days,

and your chamber kept for a week, will satisfy the servants. After that, you can take your walks and drives as usual; leaving all further care of the little fellow to me and his nurse. I wish we had her here by this time, for the boy is getting sadly cold and weak!—There!—he does not look so frightful now!”—continued Madame Gervais, as Matilda, alarmed by her lamentations, raised it closer to her bosom to preserve warmth in its little frame. And so successful had been her manœuvres, that already Lady Norman was interested in its behalf.

“ People not used to the sight of young children are no great judges of such matters,” resumed the *garde*. “ But I, who have a couple of hundred such *marmots* in my arms in the course of a year, can assure you that this is a most promising babe. I’d stake my life he’ll grow up a beauty; and what’s more, I’d stake my life that, before the year’s up, you’ll be most as fond of it as if ’twas your own!—I’m experienced in such matters, *ma bonne dame*; and ’tis written in

your face that you were born to be doatingly fond of children. Monsieur chose this boy out of several in the *Hospice* because of its fairness. He wished it to be *beautifully* fair, that it might resemble *milédi* in complexion !”

By this impromptu piece of flattery, Madame Gervais completed her triumph !—All suspicion was gradually dissipating from the mind of Lady Norman. The maligner who accused her of being a dupe knew not, perhaps, to what extent she had been trusted by her husband. Having locked up the slip of writing in her desk and resolved to make no allusion on the subject to her husband, she gave all her attention to her little nursling.

Installed in full splendour after the arrival of his nurse, the contented child, sleeping in his magnificent *berçonnnette*, looked truly the heir of Selwood ; and Matilda, having seen the new comers comfortably established, disposed herself to take a few hours’ rest in the adjoining chamber ; and her sleep was no longer disturbed by the painful visions of the preceding night. It was

very late when she woke, roused perhaps at last by the officiousness of the *garde*, who had crept tiptoe into the room.

“ Well, to be sure !—I hope we have rested soundly !”—cried Madame Gervais, drawing aside the curtains, in obedience to Matilda’s commands. “ Fresh as a rose, too, dame !—A very different face from those of the poor suffering creatures I am in the habit of attending !—Ah ! your Ladyship is truly in luck to have all the comfort and satisfaction of a beautiful little boy, without fear, pain, doctor, or physic !—What would some of my poor ladies give to become a mother on such easy terms !—Shall I bring my little man to say good morning to his pretty mamma ?—”

And without waiting for a reply she fetched the sleeping infant, and laid it by Matilda’s side, to make its own way to that kind and gentle heart.

It was thus she found herself suddenly greeted by Sir Richard Norman !—Though overwhelmed with delight at beholding his wife so rapidly reconciled to her position, he

had too much tact to express either joy or gratitude; but took a seat calmly by her bedside, and waited till it was her pleasure to address him.

“I am puzzled at present what to call this young gentleman,” said she, bending over the sleeping boy to conceal her embarrassment. “What do you intend shall be his name?—”

“Whatever pleases your fancy, my dear Matilda.”

“Your *own* then.”

“No!”—replied her husband, his voice slightly faltering, “I should be jealous to hear you apply that name in a tone of endearment to any but myself.”

“You will choose godfathers for him; and etiquette requires, I believe, that *they* should decide the point,” said Matilda, recollecting with shame the offer made by old Cruttenden to enrich and give his name to her expected child.

“Our good friend Guerchant has undertaken the office,” replied Sir Richard, “and I was thinking of writing to Ireland to Mandeville to become the other.”

“I fear,” said Matilda, with a deep blush, “that my father will be greatly mortified unless solicited to become one of the sponsors.”

“Impossible!”—cried Norman. “I could not reconcile it to myself, dearest, to accept the kindness and liberality of your family, for one so wholly devoid of claims upon them.”

“Under all the circumstances, there must be many things to which we shall find it difficult to reconcile ourselves,” said Lady Norman. “But we can do no less than place the little fellow wholly and absolutely in the light of our child; and it would be cruel to debar my father from a happiness and honour, which cannot be withheld without offence.”

“It is not for me to deny a request of yours,” replied Sir Richard. “But as, according to the laws of France, this boy must be registered at the Mairie within three days of his birth, not only as the offspring of ‘Sir Richard Norman and Matilda Maule his wife,’ but explicitly by his christian name, it will be as well to have him baptized this evening by the curé of St. Sylvain

by the name of Walter Norman ; which is at once that of the Admiral and of one of my immediate ancestors, and renders our patronymic rightfully his own."

"With all my heart !" replied Matilda. "I have no doubt Master Walter will do honour to his name. I beg his pardon for calling him a fright this morning, before I had obtained a full view of his august person ; for I now think him a very fine little fellow," said she, imprinting a kiss on his forehead, "and Madame Gervais promises that his beauty shall eclipse that of my little friend of the Champs Elysées."

There was something in the allusion not altogether satisfactory to Sir Richard. Delighted as he was to find Matilda conferring her good offices on the little stranger, he was silent when she concluded her observations by this reference to the Normans.

At that moment, Madame Gervais, stealing in with a significant smile, informed them that *Madame l'épouse de Monsieur le ministre de la marine* was in the next room waiting for permis-

sion to pay her compliments to *l'accouchée*.—Was she to be admitted ?”

“ By all means !”—cried Sir Richard, allowing no time for Matilda to demur. “ You can ask her to become the boy’s god-mother with the Admiral, which will remove all difficulties. *Rather* too blooming for an invalid !”—he continued, pressing Matilda’s hand as it smoothed down the infant’s robe, while Madame Gervais went to usher in the future *marraine*. “ However, you look as happy and maternal as could be desired !—Have no fears on *that* account.”

“ Fie, fie !” was the hasty adjuration of the good Madame Guerchant, on finding Matilda engaged in cheerful conversation in a room into which the April sun was brightly shining. “ Do you mean to kill yourself with these exertions ? My best congratulations to you, *chère milédi*, and a hearty welcome to your little son !—A boy, you see, as I prognosticated,—and everything going on as well as possible.—Since you *will* have daylight in your room, I must be allowed a peep at your child.—Ha ! the living image of Sir Richard I protest !—his forehead exactly,—exactly the

dimple on the chin !—A noble boy,—a beautiful child,—worthy to be born a Frenchman, and a subject of our beloved Emperor !—”

Without noticing the confusion into which her remarks had thrown the Normans, she embraced the boy, dismissed the *garde*, and ran on to the news of the day ;—to the questions before the Chamber,—the audiences given the preceding night by the Emperor ; in the midst of which, Matilda discovered from some accidental expression that Norman had not, according to his assertion, dined the day before with Admiral Guerchant !—Why had he deceived her ?—On that trivial point, at least, she had been unquestionably “ a dupe !” All her misgivings recurred with the reflection !—

Meanwhile, Sir Richard had quitted the room to afford leisure to Matilda for her request concerning the sponsorship ; and amid the *caquetage* that ensued between Madame Gervais and the mother and grandmother of seven and twenty living descendants, Lady Norman had a moment’s respite for conjecture and mortification.

Her husband, however, was luckily as uncon-

scious of the discovery she had made as of the warning she had received.

Satisfied that all difficulties were overcome,—that his deep-laid plans had fully succeeded,—that all was upon velvet,—that he was the happiest of the human race,—he retired to his morning-room to complete a few trifling announcements suggested to him by Matilda. As he sat down to his writing-table in the highest spirits, a smile of triumph stole over his handsome features.

“After all,”—murmured he to himself, as he placed two letters on the desk before him, “my very cares turn to blessings—my thorns send forth blossoms—I am the most fortunate man on earth!—Even the annoyance of having to acquaint old Maule of the existence of a grandson, is fully compensated by the delight of being able to announce to those insupportable people at Grove Park, per favour of the Times and Morning Post, the birth of my son and heir!—”

As he spoke, he prepared to seal the two epistles destined to convey to the two anxious families such opposite emotions of joy and grief.—But lo ! as he stood before the taper, with

the seal, bearing the aristocratic blazon of the Normans ready in his hand to attest the transmission of a fraud, the library door was thrown open, and a servant entered announcing—"the Abbé O'Donnel!—"

CHAPTER XV.

You undergo too strict a paradox,
Striving to make an ugly deed look fair.

SHAKSPEARE.

It was somewhat more than four years after the occurrence of these events, that two travelling carriages, containing Sir Richard Norman and his family, drove through the village of Selwood, on their return to the Manor.

Summer was in its prime;—peace and plenty were in the land;—and the tenants of the long-absent family, rejoicing in the prospect of renewed benefactions and hospitalities, prepared to greet them with the warmest welcome; and above all, to afford a triumphal inauguration to

the young heir of Selwood. A rustic arch was erected at the entrance of the village, covered with laurels interspersed with roses, and blazing with gaudy flags and gold-leaf; while a far more beautiful embellishment was prepared by the hands of nature, in the bloom of the numerous little gardens encompassing the humble tenements lining the road, and in the verdure of the magnificent woods of Selwood, which formed a noble embankment in the back-ground.

Though secretly embarrassed by the ill-timed enthusiasm of his tenantry, Sir Richard could not but feel gratified, when, on reaching the outskirts of his domain, he was saluted by hearty cheers; while a dense mob of farmers and labouring men assembled round the carriage, with cries of “God bless you!”—“Long life to the old family!”—“Good luck to our young landlord!”—“Success to the heir of Selwood!”—At the last stage, he caused little Walter to be removed from the second carriage to his own; and now presented the noble looking child to the multitude, whose acclamations might have daunted the courage of a less spirited boy. As if

conscious of his consequence, however, the child replied to their cheers by waving his little hat ; and on Sir Richard requiring them from the carriage-window to desist from their attempt to take off the horses and drag the carriage up the hill to the Manor, Walter Norman offered his little hand to be shaken by the foremost of the crowd, with all the affability of a prince ! The travellers being at length permitted to proceed on their journey, the villagers of Selwood, ere they dispersed to their habitations for the enjoyment of their holiday, assembled in high court of rustic parliament at the stocks (which in old fashioned villages constitute the seat of government, as the sight of a gibbet is supposed to announce the existence of civilization), and decreed that Sir Richard had brought back from foreign parts a far more cheerful face than he took away ; and that my lady had brought back a son and heir bidding fair to be an honour to the family.

They admitted, however, that this was all the improvement visible in “ my lady.”—Their unprejudiced eyes quickly discerned that a shade

was upon her brow ;—that her cheek was paler than of old,—her brow more pensive. Though still in the prime of youth, a blight was upon her cheek,—a blight, engendered by unceasing self-reproaches.

Not all the changes and diversions they had witnessed in their travels, had sufficed to drive her deep-seated grief from the heart of Lady Norman. Having quitted Paris as soon as the expiration of the hundred days brought back the allied armies, and in their train, the coterie of fashionable English, so distasteful to Sir Richard, they had visited every remarkable country in Europe ;—had passed a winter in Rome, another in Vienna, and a third in Berlin ;—wandering, during the intervening summers, among the scenery of the Apennines, the Pyrenees, the Jura, and the miniature Switzerland of Saxony. Matilda had acquired new impressions,—new languages,—new friends ; but the one still-enduring affliction weighed heavily as ever on her heart.

For it was of a nature that forbad its being lessened by participation !—Sir Richard Norman

had not only bound her by solemn pledges never to afford a hint upon the subject to living mortal, but had interdicted all further reference to it as regarded himself. He seemed desirous to forget what had occurred ; and Matilda sometimes almost fancied he had succeeded,—so rapturous was the delight he took in the progress and promise of his heir,—so intense the affection with which he regarded the adopted child !—

Lady Norman, herself, dearly loved the boy. It would have been impossible to withhold her fondness from a creature so deeply attached to herself. Yet in her fondest caresses, there mingled a pang of bitterness. There was always a reserve in her attachment. She could never at any moment forget that she beheld in Walter the evidence of unexpiated error, the living proof of an enormous breach of integrity. Of late, indeed, a new care had arisen in her mind connected with his mysterious adoption ; but too recently to be accountable for the sadness which had defaced the bloom of her bright and beautiful youth.

Meanwhile, the travellers were installed once

more under the roof of the Manor ; and never had the place appeared to such advantage in the eyes of Sir Richard Norman. The depth and richness of English verdure clothing the park and woodlands, was not more refreshing to his eye than the completeness and elegance of the house. Among the noble palaces and princely mansions of the continent, he had seen nothing so comfortably adapted to the convenience of life. There were all the attributes of the palace,—pictures, statues, a fine library, a noble observatory ;—but there was also the snug book-room, the well-warmed vestibule and staircase, the commodious chambers and airy dressing-rooms, exclusively characteristic of the English country-house.

Already Walter was coursing over the close-shaven velvet lawn the poor infirm spaniel, which by its frolics seemed to recognise its home of old ; while Matilda stood on the threshold of the conservatory opening from the saloon, gazing upon the fine exotics which had attained such growth during her absence ; convinced that though the plants and flowers of southern

climates may be more glowing and luxuriant, in no country are they so intimately brought home to domestic enjoyment as in England.

Great improvements had been achieved in the place during their absence. A large portion of their income, economized on the continent, had enabled Sir Richard to diversify the park with plantations, and the extension of a fine stream of water; while the interior of the house was adorned with the noble collection of objects of art he had gradually amassed abroad. The *chef-d'œuvre* of the improvements, however, was a dressing-room destined for Matilda; which opened through a trelliced balcony to the coved roof of the conservatory, concealed by a screen of climbing exotics. Lined with alternate panels of Florentine, Mosaic, and Venetian glass, the intervening draperies were of Lyons silk of the palest fawn colour. No gilding,—no finery,—no starry ceiling or glittering cornices. The tables, carved from blocks of the purest white marble, had been despatched home from Carrara; and an exquisite statue of

Silence, by Bartolini, graced the pedestal in the alcove.

Conducted in triumph by her husband to this temple of luxury, Matilda knew not whether most to applaud the taste of its decorations, or the consideration which had presided over their selection. All alienation of feeling had long ceased between Sir Richard and herself. So complete was their re-union, that it seemed scarcely explicable how coldness or mistrust should ever have sprung up between them; and Matilda felt grateful to him for having effaced, by this preparation of a new chamber for her use, all recollection of the painful hours of her last sojourn at Selwood Manor.

All was sunshine now.—The house seemed to have lost its former cheerless look; and one at least of its inhabitants had overcome since last he crossed its threshold, the only unsatisfactory circumstance connected with the spot. Sir Richard no longer feared that the inheritance he took so much pleasure in adorning, would pass to the enjoyment of an enemy!—

“ I like this room;—I will have this room for

my own ;—I will come and live in this pretty room with mamma !”—cried little Walter, following Sir Richard and Lady Norman to their retreat.

“ There is no place for you here, Sir,—unless, indeed, you mean to deprive me of mine,”—said Sir Richard, patting the wayward little fellow on the head with doting fondness.

“ *May* I turn him out, mamma ?”—persisted the child. “ I should so much like to be with you here, all to ourselves !—”

“ Upon my word, you have a good notion of making yourself comfortable !”—resumed Sir Richard, who could never see a fault in Walter. “ But I don’t intend to be deposed before my time. Content yourself with your nursery.”

“ Where is his nursery ?”—demanded Matilda.

“ At some distance,—in the eastern wing,—the rooms that were mine in my childhood,” replied Norman, carelessly. “ I sent orders to have them refurnished, and have no doubt all is very comfortable. The great advantage is, that being so far off, you need not be troubled with him more than you like.”

“ But I never trouble her !—Do I, mamma ?”
—cried Walter, sturdy in the assertion of his rights. “ I won’t be sent away from her. I won’t stay in this place at all, if I may not remain with my mamma.”

The exulting smile with which Sir Richard glanced towards his wife, plainly expressed—
“ *Could* a child of your own have loved you more dearly ?” But he found no correspondent triumph in the eyes of his wife. He could almost fancy that hers were suffused with tears. Hastily consigning the boy to the care of his attendant, he invited her to saunter with him through the shrubberies till dinner-time ; but Matilda pleaded fatigue. She was either overpowered by her journey, or by the emotion produced by her return to that long-forgotten home.

Her heart experienced the need of other consolations than rich furniture or gay flower-gardens. She wanted cheering friends—comfortable counsel. There was a weight upon her mind—a weight she still lacked courage to confide to her husband. She would have given much for the solace of female companionship ;—

for the presence of her surviving sister,—of the motherly Mrs. Ravenscroft,—the light-hearted Sophia. But during her absence the chain of her friendship and connections had been snapped asunder. Miss Ravenscroft was now the happy wife of Lord Selsdon, and settled with him at a family mansion in Shropshire, beyond reach of neighbourship with the Normans; and her proud mother was absent from Selwood cottage, presiding over the events which had given a first grandchild both to herself and her friends at Farleigh Castle.

Of the home of Matilda's childhood scarcely a trace remained. Upon the marriage of his daughter Elizabeth with a rich Liverpool merchant, old Maule had found it impossible to confront, unsupported, the bickerings and twittings of his partner. His health being impaired by a paralytic seizure which disabled him for business, he reluctantly resigned his sceptre into the hands of his son. Cruttenden Maule and his godfather now reigned in the old man's stead; and if his place knew him no longer, it was difficult for him to know his

place ;—so completely had his old factory and engines given way to the new-fangled constructions now honouring the name of the firm.

Thwarted by their innovations and disheartened by sickness, Mr. Maule had divided the years of Matilda's absence between his son's rectory in Yorkshire, and his daughter's pleasant country-seat on the banks of the Mersey ; and Lady Norman feared that with the happy, prosperous Mrs. Avesford, she should entertain an intimacy scarcely more sisterly than with the Elizabeth tyrannized by Tom Cruttenden, and estranged from her by the superstitious terrors of her father. Her youngest sister had been some years dead. Her brother William had fallen at Waterloo in all the glitter of his first Hussar jacket. There were none remaining but her happily-married brother and sister, and Cruttenden, who was becoming, as his father had been before him, a mere wheel of the factory. From Lady Norman's own kindred, neither sympathy nor companionship was to be expected.

It is the fate even of the most prosperous

to experience moments of despondency, when they fancy themselves abandoned by a world that stands aloof to deride their sensibility, and rejoice over their distresses. Such was the mood of Lady Norman when, after being cheered back to Selwood by hundreds of voices and affectionately welcomed to her home by the husband she adored, she took this hasty glance of her loves and friendships; and decided that the tie which linked her to her father's household was broken for ever, and the pleasant confidence of Selwood cottage wholly destroyed. There was none to turn to for comfort but her husband; and it was precisely in her husband that, at that moment, she felt reluctant to confide.

For the event which, for so many years, she had vainly sighed for, at length threatened accomplishment.—As if in mockery,—as if in retribution,—her dearest wish was granted to be her punishment.—For some months past, Matilda had been aware that she was likely to become a mother !—

Admonished by her own regrets, she had not

courage to communicate her expectations to Sir Richard. She felt what must be his self-accusation on learning a circumstance that promised him a lawful heir, disinherited by his guilty manœuvres in favour of an alien. He had defrauded his unborn child;—its guilty mother having connived in the act of spoliation!—

Matilda dreaded the effect such intelligence must produce upon her husband. Fondly and intensely as she had longed to possess a child of her own, all satisfaction in her present prospect was destroyed by the fear that she should produce a son, the sight of whom must be a perpetual condemnation to his parents.—What, *what* would now be the remorse of Sir Richard, the instigator of that culpable transaction!—

Still, he must be prepared. The time was at hand when it would be no longer possible to conceal the truth; and nothing but the extreme improbability that, after thirteen years' marriage, such an event should occur, could account for his blindness. Their return to Selwood having been long intended, Matilda fancying

she should find it easier to announce the unwelcome fact at home, had postponed her revelation. Yet now that they were once more under their own roof, she felt that *there*, of all places, the confession was most difficult. It was so painful to damp the elation of spirit arising from the sensation of being at home; and the pride of having to exhibit so noble a boy as his son and heir!—Matilda resolved to defer it for a few days longer,—*only* for a few days; enough to forward her own recovery from the fatigues of her journey, and afford time for the exaltation of her husband's spirits to subside.

Every day, however, seemed to increase his triumph. She almost regretted that the Abbé O'Donnel had ceased to be her inmate, whom she used formerly to fancy a check upon the hilarity of Norman. But since the birth of the child, the good old man had withdrawn from their household to the college of which he was a member; taking leave of Matilda with so much fervour of fatherly tenderness and compassion, that she accused herself of want of charity in

her previous suspicions. The Abbé bade her adieu with tears; and though he refused to perform the baptismal ceremony for her supposed child, in disgust probably at the heresy of the mother, he accompanied his farewell with a solemn benediction to herself, at once gratifying and affecting.

The news of the Normans' arrival at Selwood Manor, soon brought visitors from all quarters of the county. It was summer; the roads were in good repair, (owing, as Lord Selsdon always protested, to the number of magistrates and notabilities attracted to the place during the spinsterhood of his pretty wife;) and acquaintances, both intimate and unfamiliar, came in troops to ascertain whether Sir Richard and his Lady were better looking, or worse for wear, and to criticise the works of *virtù* they had been collecting on the continent.

Of these visitors, their friends from Farleigh Castle were the most welcome. Lady Emily, who had attained the sober age of five and twenty previous to their departure, seemed to have added more than four years to her life in the

interim; and Matilda, habituated to the usages of the continent, could not help regretting that Lady Emily should wither on the virgin stem, growing cross and prudish according to the spinster nature of old-maidenly England, for want of some kind friend to bring to issue the many admirations of young men too modest to press unencouraged pretensions to her hand. Lady Emily's baffled instincts had found an aim in teaching the young ideas of Farleigh village how to shoot; and, lacking the softening partialities of motherly nature, her preceptorship in Sunday schools and daily classes, rendered her arbitrary and dictatorial. But if no longer a gentle graceful girl, she was a woman of sense and good breeding; and as such, was duly conscious of the acquisition secured to her society by the return of Matilda.

"Were you not surprised at my brother's marriage?"—she inquired, at her first solitary visit to Selwood Manor.

"More pleased than surprised," replied Lady

Norman. "From the first, I thought it a likely thing to happen. Two young people living in such near neighbourhood,—on such friendly terms."

"The very reason which prevented *my* anticipating anything of the kind !—Affairs of that description so seldom occur in a straightforward, matter-of-fact way. George used to come down from town raving about Lady Emmeline this, or Lady Helena the other, and seemed to take very little notice of Sophy."

"He did not *talk* much of her, perhaps."

"He was afraid, it seems, that my father and mother might expect him to make what is called a better match."

"They had certainly a right to look for rank and fortune for Lord Selsdon."

"I don't agree with you, dear Lady Norman ; no more did *they*. If the only son of an Earl with an unencumbered estate of thirty thousand a-year, may not form a marriage of inclination, who on earth has a right to make a choice ? Sophy was a gentlewoman with a gentlewoman's

fortune and education, and a match for any man in the kingdom."

"She had qualities to render any man in the kingdom happy," observed Matilda. "So much sweetness of temper,—so much sprightliness of character."

"Yet with all these probabilities to bring the marriage about, it was very near failing of accomplishment," said Lady Emily. "My father and mother, who are the honestest people breathing, and without the slightest capacity for a manœuvre, determined to bring about a connection on which they had set their hearts, and which would have settled itself without their interference. With this view, they persuaded Mrs. Ravenscroft to settle at Selwood; and soon after her arrival, the old lady having accidentally remarked to her lady-cousin that one of Lord Arden's daughters would make a suitable match for Selsdon, mamma put on a most significant face, and begged she would not mention such a thing, as she and Lord Farleigh had other views for their son."

“ Alluding to Sophia ?—”

“ Exactly ; while Mrs. Ravenscroft, who has seen something of the world in her time, instead of conceiving that any such downright allusion was intended, fancied mamma desirous of forewarning her against forming presumptuous expectations for her daughter. Meanwhile, Selsdon’s attentions to Sophy commenced and proceeded. *You* went abroad instead of remaining to bring things to an issue between your young friends ; and *I* have been too long accustomed to see young gentlemen devote their homage to young ladies without any *serious* intentions as they are called, to suppose that these daily meetings were producing other results than pleasant rides and walks.”

“ Instead of which, Lord Selsdon fell desperately in love ?—”

“ And never told his love ; while Sophy not only fell in love, but felt it her duty to acknowledge to her mother her growing partiality. More evil consequences from doing things in a straightforward way, in this world of zigzag and

deceit !—Mrs. Ravenscroft, terrified as she would have been on learning that the cottage was infected by cholera or typhus-fever, saw, no remedy but flight. After informing Sophia, from the authority of his own mother, that Lord Selsdon was an engaged man, she ordered fumigations,—quitted home,—carried her daughter off to Devonshire on a visit to Captain Ravenscroft's relations, leaving us not even a message of courtesy or farewell. Imagine poor Selsdon's despair, and my indignation !—”

“ I can better imagine that of Sophia. Well do I remember the desponding tone of the letters I received from her ; which, as they explained nothing of these occurrences, I attributed to illness. I was so much alarmed as to address Mrs. Ravenscroft on the subject, who entreated me, in reply, to write cheerfully to Sophia, and without giving her any suspicion of my uneasiness. Scarcely a month afterwards, a letter from Sophy, overflowing with love and rapture, acquainted me that her marriage was settled with the man of her choice ;—reminding

me of a certain walk to a certain old forge where we had met Lord Selsdon and been escorted by him home ;—and assuring me that her prospects of happiness were confirmed by the generous concessions of Lord and Lady Farleigh.”

“ Ungrateful girl to say nothing of their amiable daughter,” cried Lady Emily, almost in earnest ; “ when, if it had not been for my exertions, she might have spent a twelvemonth longer at Torbay, listening to the pother of her uncles and aunts. It was I who, in compassion to Selsdon, managed to find out the address of the fugitives. I remember losing a whole morning shouting my cross-examination to old Mrs. Lynch, trying to detect, like a Bow-street officer, the haunts and connections of the Ravenscroft side, of which mamma knew nothing.”

“ And the result was, that Lord Selsdon followed them,—proposed,—was accepted ; and, as the story-books say, they lived very happy ever afterwards?—”

“ *Too* happy, I am sometimes inclined to

think," replied Lady Emily with a smile. "They are so dreadfully domestic, self-satisfied, and indolent, that I am sadly afraid of Selsdon's sinking into a jovial, good-humoured, selfish, agricultural-meeting, game-law, country-gentleman. My brother is growing fat and florid; noisy in company, and drowsy by his fire-side."

"Fie, fie!—this is exaggeration,"—said Matilda smiling in her turn, "Sophia would never tolerate such a companion. With all her elegant pursuits, her music, her painting; her modelling.—"

"She has not given half an hour to any one of them from the date of the honey-moon!" interrupted Lady Emily. "Sophy is a person of cultivated tastes, rather than of cultivated understanding; and these required continual incitement to keep them alive. Selsdon cares nothing for music, unless the key-bugle; or for drawing, unless sporting pictures, or Cruickshank's sketches. He likes his wife to dawdle about with him all the morning,—ride with him all the afternoon, and work Berlin work while he snoozes

after dinner. This labour of love, Sophia accomplishes to a miracle. I don't believe they have opened a book since they settled at Tuxwell Hall !”

“ And now this little girl has made her appearance——”

“ There will be more dawdling and fondling than ever !——”

“ In such contented idleness consists perhaps the truest happiness of life,” sighed Matilda. “ Lord and Lady Selsdon neglect no duties in thus devoting themselves to each other.”

“ Pardon me,” replied Lady Emily, stoutly. “ They owe something to society,—something to my father and mother,—something to the world. We can rarely get them to Farleigh Castle, nor ever persuade Selsdon to give his attention to county business, or prepare himself for the coming session, when my uncle Henry is to vacate his seat in his favour. They scarcely ever leave home,—they are sinking into obscurity ;—I assure you, Mrs. Ravenscroft is

much the youngest and most agreeable of the party."

"These are early times. They have only been married two years," said Lady Norman. "Almost every marriage produces *two* years of domestic devotion. For my friend Sophy's sake, I wish I did not feel sure that Lord Selsdon will live to be an excellent member of parliament,—to preside at public dinners,—head deputations,—present petitions,—frequent Boodle's, and distinguish his darling Sophy by the name of Lady Selsdon."

"That would be carrying things further than I wish," cried Lady Emily, kindly. "I love my sister-in-law dearly; and should be grieved to see her neglected for the schemes of experimental philanthropy which in these times form such hosts of committees, associations, reports, bad husbands, and careless fathers; more especially as she has no taste for books to supply the companionship she would have to dispense with. But I *do* wish that Selsdon's wife had been a woman more substantially educated, or

more energetic in her nature; and I trust my dear Lady Norman will endeavour to rouse poor Sophy from her habits of indolence.—And now that I have abused her to my heart's content, let me see your little boy.—We are all very curious to behold this prodigy—this little Louis XIV.—this long-looked-for-come-at-last young heir of Selwood Manor. I was suggesting to Papa last night that, twenty years hence, he would make a charming match for little Louisa Farleigh. Do you give your consent?”

“You forget that Walter will be a Roman Catholic,” said Matilda, with a blushing face.

“Twenty years hence, I suspect, *that* will be a distinction without a difference,” cried Lady Emily. “The papists are becoming so moderate, and the protestants so complying, that all memory of fire and fagots is extinguished. We shall have emancipation and a catholic chancellor without so much as finding it out. Ha! Sir Richard—Good morning!—Delighted to see you back in Worcestershire.—I am come to

have a peep at your pictures, and statues, and son and heir ; and to propose an alliance for him with my little niece. What say you ?—Will you accept a Lady Louisa Norman ?—”

Sir Richard replied with playful gallantry, —caused the boy to be paraded before his future aunt,—and parried Lady Emily’s compliments on the dark hair and eyes of young Walter, as exactly resembling his own. For in spite of Madame Gervais’s civilities, the adopted child bore a far stronger resemblance to Sir Richard, than to the fair Saxon beauty of Matilda.

“ I hope you will bring this little fellow with you next week to Farleigh Castle,” continued Lady Emily. “ My father and mother want you to pass a day or two with us, to do honour to the christening they are going to bestow upon their grandchild. It would be a delightful surprise for my sister-in-law to find Lady Norman staying in the house.”

To Matilda’s great vexation, this cordial invitation was accepted by her husband ; and long

after Lady Emily's departure, she sat musing upon the necessity of declaring all to her husband, ere she encountered the scrutiny of the large party of her own sex about to be assembled at Farleigh Castle.

END OF VOL. I.





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